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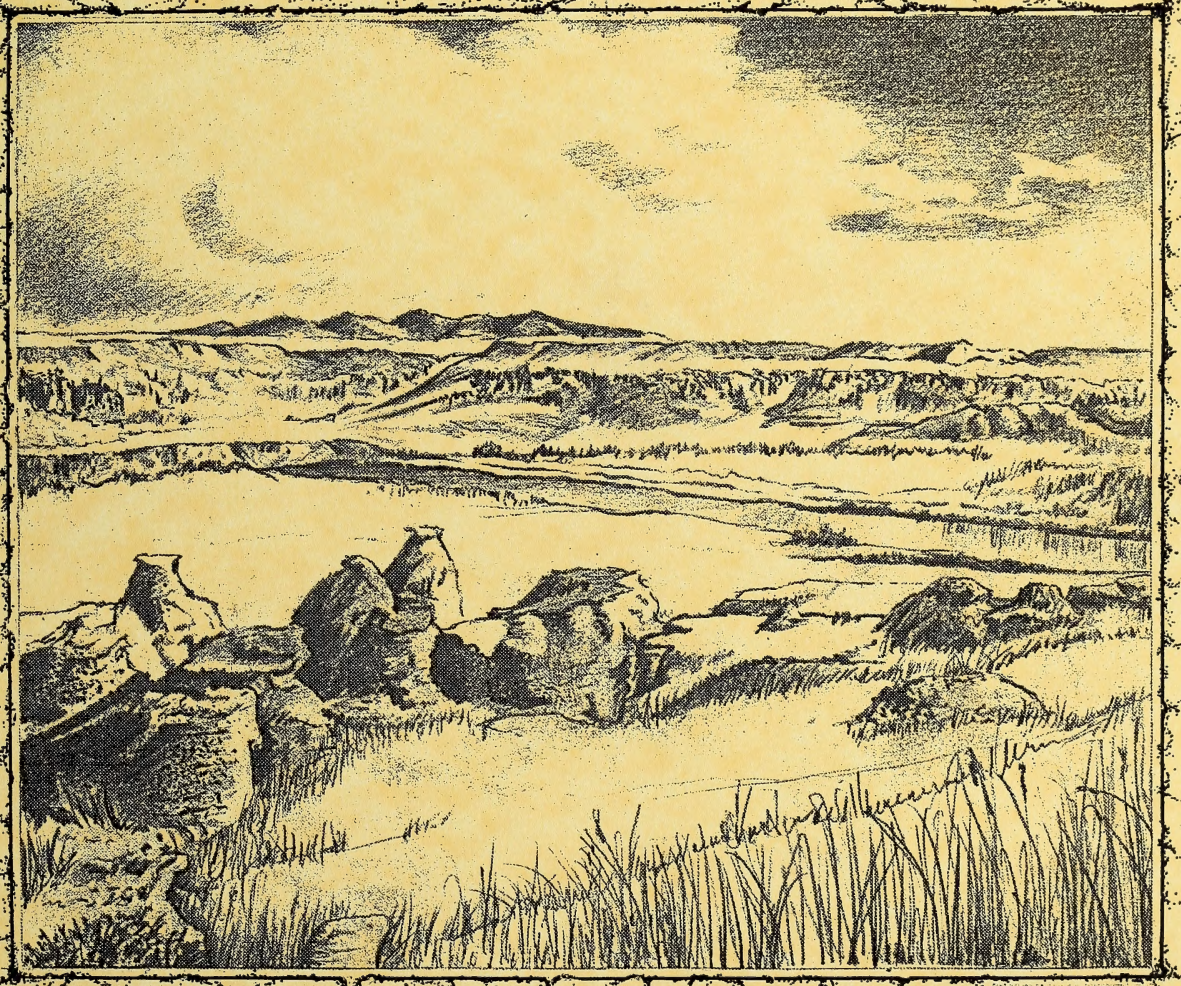
WRITING-ON-STONE PROVINCIAL PARK

MANAGEMENT PLAN



Alberta
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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MANAGEMENT PLAN

Writing-On-Stone

Provincial Park

April, 1997

Prairie Region
Natural Resources Service
Department of
Environmental Protection

Copies of this plan may be obtained from:

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APPROVAL STATEMENT

The Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park Management Plan is the official plan of the Natural Resources Service, Department of Environmental Protection for the management of this park.

The plan is a commitment by the Prairie Region to the protection and management of resources, the provision of recreation opportunities, the delivery of programs and services, and the development, operation and maintenance of facilities for the park.

F. W. Moffatt
Director
Parks/Fish and Wildlife
Prairie Region
Natural Resources Service
Department of Environmental Protection

Date 20 January 1997

The plan is consistent with the provisions of the Provincial Parks Act and Regulations and with provincial policies, priorities and direction.

J. R. Nichols
Assistant Deputy Minister
Natural Resources Service
Department of Environmental Protection

Date Feb 12/97

The management strategies described in this plan for the historical resources of Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park are endorsed by the Cultural Facilities and Historical Resources Division, Department of Community Development.

W. J. Byrne
Assistant Deputy Minister
Cultural Facilities and Historical Resources Division
Department of Community Development

Date April 14/97

PLANNING TEAM ENDORSEMENT

The Management Plan for Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park is recommended for approval and implementation.

C. Thesen, District Manager — Date: 96 08 16

R. Ward, Ranger-In-Charge — Date: Aug 16/96.

J. Brink, Archaeological Survey of Alberta — Date: Sept 5/96

I. Clark, Historic Sites Service — Date: August 28/96

D. Ohrn, Planner, Natural Resources Service — Date: 12 July 1996

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

APPROVAL STATEMENT
TABLE OF CONTENTS PAGE NO.

1.0 PURPOSE OF THIS MANAGEMENT PLAN 1

2.0 OVERVIEW 3

2.1 Regional Setting & Access 3

2.2 Resource Description 3

2.3 Market Analysis 10

3.0 SYSTEMS CONTEXT 12

3.1 Classification 12

3.2 Natural History Theme Representation 12

3.3 Special and Unique Features 14

3.3.1 Geological and Geomorphic Features 14
3.3.2 Aquatic Features 14
3.3.3 Vegetation Features 14
3.3.4 Wildlife Features 15
3.3.5 Visual Resource Features 15
3.3.6 Historical Resource Features 15

3.4 General Park Objectives 15

3.4.1 Preservation 16
3.4.2 Heritage Appreciation 16
3.4.3 Outdoor Recreation 17
3.4.4 Tourism/Economic Development 17

4.0 PARK LAND MANAGEMENT ZONES 18

4.1 Park-wide Management Direction 18

4.2 Historical Protection Zone 20

4.2.1 Preservation 20
4.2.2 Heritage Appreciation 22
4.2.3 Outdoor Recreation 24
4.2.4 Tourism 24

4.3 Facility Zone 25

4.3.1 Preservation 25
4.3.2 Heritage Appreciation 27
4.3.3 Outdoor Recreation 28
4.3.4 Tourism/Economic Development 29

4.4 Natural Environment Zone 30

4.4.1 Preservation 30
4.4.2 Heritage Appreciation 35
4.4.3 Outdoor Recreation 36
4.4.4 Tourism/Economic Development 36

5.0 LAND USE AND DISPOSITIONS 37
6.0 SURROUNDING LAND 43
7.0 COORDINATION 47
8.0 DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENTS 48
9.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN PARK MANAGEMENT 52
10.0 PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE PARK NAME 54
11.0 APPLICATION FOR WORLD HERITAGE SITE STATUS 55
12.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW 56
13.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY 57

APPENDICES

A. Public Involvement in Preparation of the Management Plan.

B. Environmentally Significant Area Description

1.0 PURPOSE OF THIS MANAGEMENT PLAN:

The purpose of this management plan is to provide overall direction for the management of land and resources in Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park. The primary goal of the plan is to establish an appropriate balance between public use and resource protection.

Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park is renowned for native rock art and spectacular sandstone hoodoos and cliffs. With expansion of the park in 1991 to incorporate coulees and landscapes south of the Milk River, it now also contributes to the protection of a wider range of resources. The park also offers a pleasant setting for camping and picnicking as well as interpretive tours. These attractions, combined with sensitive resources that are very vulnerable to disturbances, result in a park management challenge for the Natural Resources Service. This management plan is intended to provide guidance as to how to effectively meet this challenge.

The management plan covers the following topics:

- Brief overview of background information concerning park resources and public use.
- Context and role of the park in the province-wide system of protected areas.
- Areas requiring common management approaches, enabling the creation of zones for which objectives and guidelines are established.
- Land uses involving legal instruments, such as leases and regulations.
- Relationship of park land with surrounding land and implications for both.
- Coordination required between the Natural Resources Services and others in the management of resources both in and around the park.
- Requirements for the upgrading of existing or installation of additional facilities.
- A proposal for an amendment to the name for the park.
- A statement of intention to apply for UNESCO World Heritage Site status for the park.

The preparation of the management plan was done with public input from individuals and organizations with an interest in the park. The special character and sensitivity of this park engenders strong views on its management.

Generally, the public view is that Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park is an exceptionally special place for which very great care must be taken to preserve its unique qualities while providing opportunities for the public to appreciate this place.

This management plan will be in effect for ten years, after which time it will be opened for review and updating.

The plan focuses on the future management of land and resources in the park. It does not focus specifically on topics such as visitor services programming, staffing or other detailed operating matters. These are addressed in annual operating plans.

In 1990 a resource management plan was prepared for the park. This document is a valuable reference and contains detailed recommendations for management of the full range of park resources. The resource management plan will serve as a source book for projects, both large and small, that can be carried out as priorities permit.

2.0 OVERVIEW:

2.1 Regional Setting and Access

General Location

- Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park is located near the southern border of Alberta along the Milk River (Map 1). The southern boundary of the park is only four kilometers from the boundary with the U.S.A.

Nearest Towns

- The nearest towns are Milk River (pop. 926), 42 kilometers by road to the west and Foremost (pop. 582), about 60 kilometers by road to the northeast.

Nearest Large Population Centres

- The nearest large population centres are the Cities of Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Great Falls, Montana and Calgary. The distances by road from these centres to the park are: Lethbridge - 126 km, Medicine Hat - 170 km, Great Falls - 233 km, Calgary - 259 km.

Proximity to Major Highways

- The nearest major highway is Primary Highway 4, the major north-south route connecting Alberta with the United States. Paved roads in good condition extend into the park.

2.2 Resource Description

Size

- 1717.87 hectares (4,244.79 acres) (Map 2)

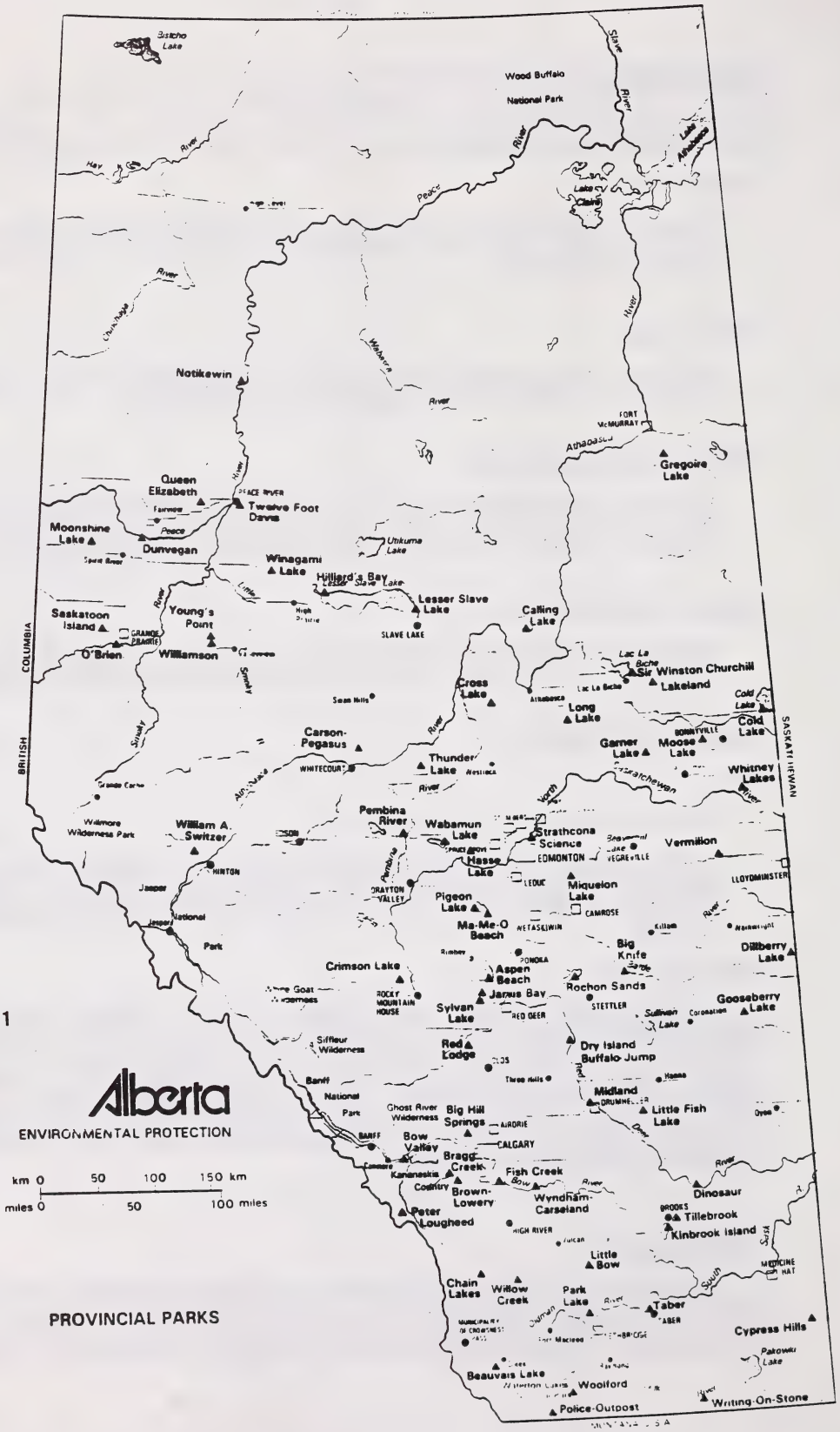
- In 1991 the park was expanded almost four-fold from 453.3 hectares (1120 acres) to its present size to include coulees and upland areas south of the Milk River. This was the culmination of almost two decades of planning, negotiating and land and grazing lease exchanges.

Natural Resources

Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park is located in the Dry Mixedgrass Subregion of the Grasslands Natural Region (Map 3). The landscape of the park consists of prairie grasslands incised by the Milk River valley and a number of coulees, containing permanent or intermittent tributary streams. The Milk River valley and the coulees are defined, for the most part, by sandstone cliffs, hoodoos and badlands. These are the most distinctive physical and visual features in the park. The bottoms of the coulees and the Milk River valley are occupied largely by riparian vegetation consisting mainly of cottonwoods and dense thickets of willow, silver buffaloberry, dogwood and other shrubs.

Cultural Resources

The native rock art is the principal reason for the original establishment of the park and remains the main focus of interest for visitors. Hundreds of pictographs and petroglyphs are found on the sandstone cliffs, mainly along the Milk River and at the mouths of Police and Van Cleeve Coulees. As these resources are extremely vulnerable to human damage, most of the

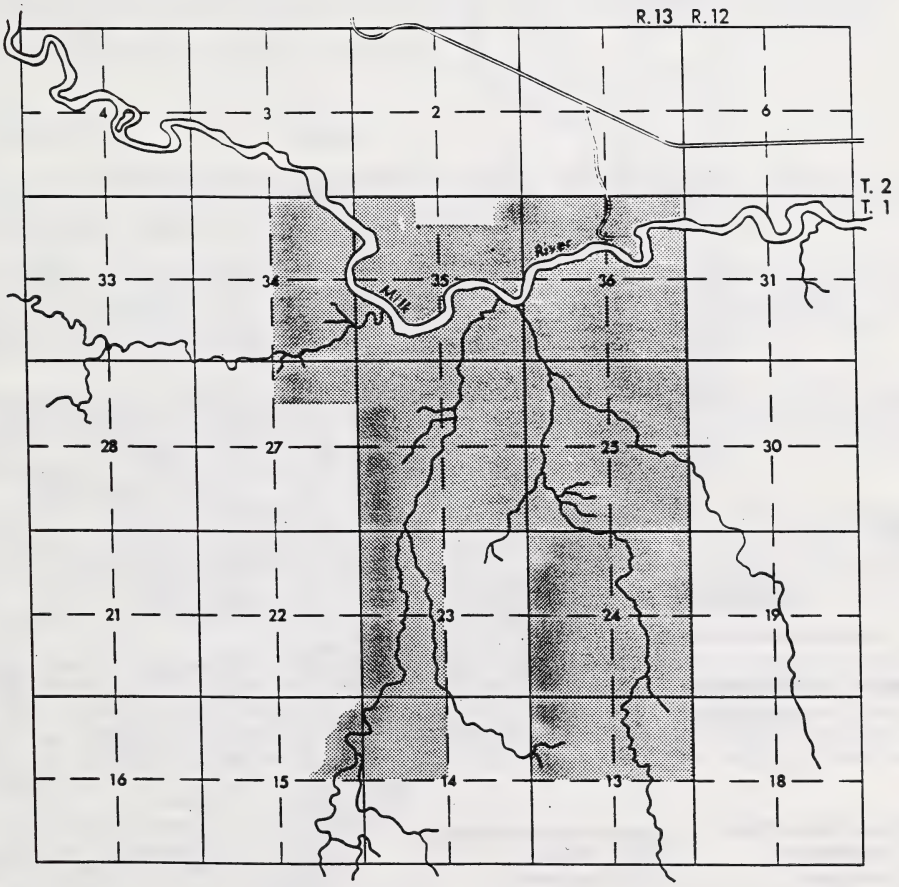


MAP 1

Produced by Parks Management Support Division, 1995

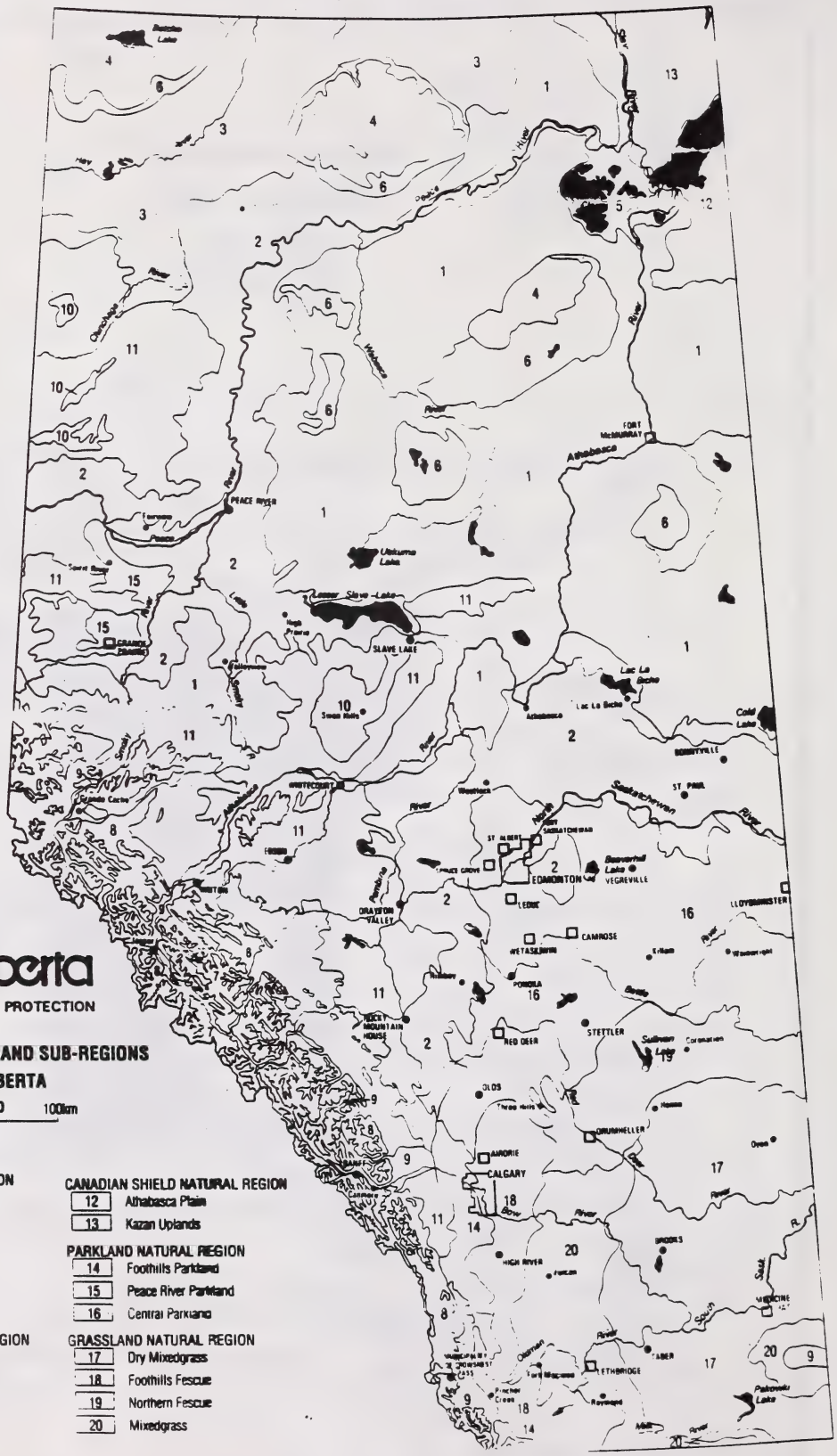
WRITING-ON-STONE
PROVINCIAL PARK

O.C. 247/92
1,717.87 Hectares
4,244.79 Acres



Alberta
RECREATION AND PARKS

MAP 2



MAP 3

Alberta

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

NATURAL REGIONS AND SUB-REGIONS OF ALBERTA

0 50 100km

BOREAL FOREST NATURAL REGION

- 1 Central Mixedwood
- 2 Dry Mixedwood
- 3 Wetland Mixedwood
- 4 Sub-Arctic
- 5 Peace River Lowlands
- 6 Boreal Highlands

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATURAL REGION

- 7 Alpine
- 8 Sub-Alpine
- 9 Montane

FOOTHILLS NATURAL REGION

- 10 Upper Foothills
- 11 Lower Foothills

CANADIAN SHIELD NATURAL REGION

- 12 Athabasca Plain
- 13 Kazan Uplands

PARKLAND NATURAL REGION

- 14 Foothills Parkland
- 15 Peace River Parkland
- 16 Central Parkland

GRASSLAND NATURAL REGION

- 17 Dry Mixedgrass
- 18 Foothills Fescue
- 19 Northern Fescue
- 20 Mixedgrass

Produced by Alberta Parks Services, Management Support Division 1994

native rock art is situated in a Restricted Access Area which the public can enter only on a guided tour.

In addition to the rock art, there are many other archaeological resources in the park, including: campsites, burials and teepee rings.

There are also cultural resources from the period connected to European settlement. The main site of this type is the reconstruction of the North West Mounted Police post at its original location. There are several sites of interest where early ranchers, settlers and police officers inscribed signatures into the sandstone.

Surrounding Lands

The park is surrounded by Crown land leased for grazing and private deeded land. The deeded private land is used mainly for dryland grain farming but also for grazing and irrigated farming. There are few farm or ranch buildings visible from the park. A visitor to the park is left with the impression of being in a natural prairie landscape, with the exception of some cultivated fields and farm buildings in the distance.

Visual Experience

One of the richest experiences for visitors to the park is the scenery outside of the park. It is an integral part of a visit to the park, both as viewed during the approach to the park entrance and as viewed from prairie-level viewpoints within the park.

The landscape surrounding the park consists of a vast expanse of native grasslands over the broad basin of the Milk River. There are some cultivated fields and a few farm buildings, but generally the sense is that one is on the original vast sea of prairie. This contributes greatly to the experience of adventure, discovery and escape for park visitors.

The grand sweep of this landscape is heightened greatly by the contrast of the forested Sweetgrass Hills rising abruptly out of the prairie several kilometers south just over the international boundary in Montana. The hills provide both a scenic backdrop and a visual focus for the landscape.

There is a moment of scenic drama upon arriving at the edge of the Milk River valley, which appears suddenly just after entering the park entrance. At this point appear the spectacular walls of sandstone cliffs and wild jumble of hoodoos, enclosing a verdant green valley of towering cottonwoods. The valley comes into view as a startling surprise, in what appears at first to be a continuous expanse of gently rolling country.

Once the visitor descends into the valley, the visual experience changes completely, from seemingly limitless open prairie, to a sheltered enclosed landscape. The sense of enclosure comes from the surrounding sandstone cliffs and fascinating hoodoos of all shapes and sizes, and from the green (or yellow) canopy of cottonwoods. The cottonwood forest provides a peaceful oasis of shade and shelter, in contract to the huge landscape of semi-arid grasslands on the upland.

Climate (from Achuff, 1992)

Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park is located near the western edge of the Dry Mixedgrass Subregion of the Grassland Natural Region, which has the warmest and driest climate in Alberta. It has a typical continental climate with cold winters, warm summers and low precipitation. Because of the warm summer temperature and a high average wind speed, the rate of evaporation is high. The mean temperature is about 16^{o} C.

Total annual precipitation is typically around 260-280 mm and summer precipitation is the lowest of any subregion in Alberta. Compared to other subregions, the Dry Mixedgrass

Subregion has high year-to-year precipitation variability. Spring is the wettest season with about two-thirds of the annual precipitation falling as rain, the peak occurring in June. The amount of snow cover is relatively low as is the number of days of continuous snow cover. Chinooks are most common along the western border of the subregion where there are more than 30 chinook days per year.

Visitor Attractions

Cultural Features

Visitors are drawn to the park primarily by the cultural resources, particularly the native rock art, and by the unique scenic qualities, especially the sandstone hoodoos and cliffs. Visitors to the park can be characterized as having for the most part a strong interest in appreciating these qualities, as opposed to other recreational activities. The native rock art is far and away the single most important attraction. The sandstone hoodoos are a draw in themselves, as the fantastic rockscape makes a challenging and mysterious place to explore for adults and children.

To facilitate interpretation of the native rock art, bus tours are provided into the Restricted Access Area to the main rock art site, the Rock Art Wall. As the petroglyphs here are in difficult-to-access locations along the base of the wall, a special trail and viewing platforms were constructed to assist in visitor viewing and interpretation.

A self-guided trail is also available to one prominent petroglyph site (the "Battle Scene"), located outside the Restricted Access Area.

Cultural features of the historic period are also of interest. These include the reconstructed NWMP post and rock inscriptions by early white visitors and residents.

Natural Attributes

The expansion of the park's land base in 1991 included coulees south of the Milk River which provide interesting opportunities for hiking and exploration. To access these areas it is necessary to ford the Milk River. Interest in this hiking opportunity is growing.

The park is identified as a Watchable Wildlife Site in the Alberta Wildlife Viewing Guide. This stature is accorded the park due to the diversity and uniqueness of the habitats in the park. Also, the situation of the park on the only river in Canada that flows to the Gulf of Mexico, results in several species unusual to Alberta occurring here. Although no facilities are provided for the sole purpose of wildlife viewing, there are many opportunities to do so.

In 1987 an Environmentally Significant Areas study was completed for the County of Warner. This study identifies an area of national or international significance within which the park lies. Refer to Appendix B for the map and description of the attributes of the area. The report defines an area of national significance as: "Features which are limited in distribution in Canada or which are the best or only representatives at a national level."

The Hoodoo Trail, which extends west from the facility area along the north side of the river for three kilometers, provides an opportunity for visitors to experience the hoodoos landscapes as well as to observe wildlife. It is also a self-guided interpretive trail.

Outdoor Recreation

Opportunities for outdoor recreation are important attractions. Floating down the Milk River makes for a very pleasant experience on a hot day. Visitors engage in this activity in the local park area, but also put in for, or take out from, longer river trips at the park. A small commercial rafting tour operator takes clients on float trips which finish at the park. There is also a small sand beach in the park which is enjoyed by visitors, although swimming is not a major activity due to the shallow and silty water.

Recreation Facilities

Recreation of a more passive nature is also important. The campground, day-use area and group-use area are popular destinations due to their very pleasant environments shaded by cottonwood trees.

The campground has 21 designated campsites and about 50 random campsites. The campground is very popular because many sites are well secluded by dense thickets of shrubbery. There are no serviced campsites. The campground operates on a self-registration system. Firewood is offered for sale by means of a concession. The recently constructed shower building is located adjacent to the campground.

The day-use area is about 15,000 m^2 in area consisting of mown grass beneath large cottonwoods. Within the day-use area is a play structure, two picnic shelters, about 15 picnic tables and six fire rings. Also in this area is a new major node of interpretive and information signs, the park interpreters' office and the departure point for bus tours to the rock art. The parking lot capacity is 48 cars.

The group-use area was recently developed on the former site of the maintenance yard. It contains a shelter, group fire ring, small area of turf grass and a toilet building.

The Role of Native People

The rock art and the Milk River valley has always been of great importance to native people and continues to be so today. The Blackfoot Nation is presently the native group with the strongest interest in and connection with the rock art. The Blackfoot Nation is comprised of the Blood Tribe, the Peigan Tribe, the South Peigan Tribe (who reside on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation in Montana) and the Siksika Nation. The Blood Tribe now appears to have the strongest interest in the park. Native people occasionally visit the park individually or in small groups to perform traditional ceremonies at the rock art sites.

Existing Land Uses

The campground, day-use area and group-use area is located in one contiguous site on a terrace of the Milk River on valley bottom land. The area of this site is about 8.4 ha.

The park maintenance yard, shop, office, permanent staff residence and seasonal staff quarters are located in one contiguous site adjacent to the north park boundary west of the park entrance. The area of this site is about 8.0 ha.

The expansion of the park in 1991 included two parcels of cultivated land in addition to coulee and native grassland. The area of these parcels is about 130 ha. These areas have been reseeded and are being allowed to revegetate to native grassland.

There is a long-term grazing lease on upland prairie land west of Police Coulee (see Map 5). This lease came into effect as a result of arrangements made to expand the park. Much of this lease area was previously cultivated and has been reseeded and allowed to naturalize.

The portion of the park which contains the most significant rock art sites is a designated Provincial Historical Resource under the authority of the Alberta Historical Resources Act. The Minister of Community Development must approve any development or significant maintenance proposed for this area (see Map 6). Much of the same area (see Map 7) is also designated by Order of the Minister of Environmental Protection as a Restricted Access Area to further protect rock art. The public may enter this area only under the direct control and supervision of park staff.

The land brought into the park in 1991 was deeded or Crown land used for cattle grazing. Some evidence (eg. cow paths) of this activity remains. Most of the park land is grassland or valley bottom land in a substantially natural condition.

Park Administration

Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park lies within the Cypress-Milk River District, which is headquartered in Cypress Hills Provincial Park. The Cypress-Milk River District is in turn part of the Prairie Region of the Dept. of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources Service, with regional offices in Lethbridge, and support services in Vulcan.

One permanent staff member is stationed in the park, the Ranger-In-Charge, who reports to the District Manager. The Ranger-In-Charge is supported by staff who work on a seasonal basis, including rangers, interpreters and maintenance workers.

2.3 Market Analysis

Reasons for Visiting the Park:

There are three primary reasons why people come to the park:

- To view and study the native rock art and historical features (particularly on guided interpretive tours).
- To view and appreciate the natural qualities of the park, particularly the sandstone hoodoos and cliffs and the Milk River (i.e. canoeing or rafting).
- To camp and picnic in a pleasant oasis in the prairie, with shade under the cottonwoods and opportunities to wade in the Milk River (mainly for children).

The first two points are the main attractions to the park for people both in the local area and beyond. The third point is an important reason for park visits by the local population (i.e. within a 100 km distance). The park has long served people living in the area as a recreation resource for picnicking and weekend camping. This factor is believed to be of lesser importance to people traveling to the park from outside the region.

There is also a fourth reason for park visits. This is as a single-night stopover point for north-south travelers on Highway 4, for example, U.S. tourists en route to Alaska or the Canadian Rockies. This component of park visitors is relatively minor.

Origins of Visitors

Park user surveys were conducted in the park in 1986 and 1988. These surveys indicated that about 80 - 90% of day-users and about 70 - 90% of campers come from Alberta.

Of the Alberta day-users 15 - 18% were from Calgary, 13 - 20 % from Lethbridge, 7 -8% from each of Edmonton and Medicine Hat, while the balance of 46-58% were from smaller communities south of Highway 3.

Of the Alberta campers 21 - 24% were from Calgary, 9 - 12% were from each of Edmonton, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. The balance of 40-52% were from smaller communities throughout Alberta.

Day-users from outside Alberta within the sample group were from Montana, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Washington and Europe. Montana and Saskatchewan had the highest representation at about 7 - 8%.

Campers from outside Alberta were represented in small numbers from three provinces and five U.S. states. No offshore visitors were noted in the samples.

Park Use

Reliable park user statistics have been available since 1986. The following general observations about trends in visits can be noted:

- Camping use has increased from 3,917 occupied campsite nights in 1987/88 to 6,290 in 1994/95. The total number of campers per year is presently about 21,700. Camping use appears to continue to slowly trend upward.

- Group use camping has increased (after opening of the group-use area in 1991) quickly to near 100% occupancy May - September (from 180 group unit nights in 1991/92 to 584 in 1994/95).

- Day-use visits are in a fairly steady state (about 25,000 - 30,000 day-users per year) with a slight increase when the pattern since 1986 is considered.

The busiest months for visitation are July and August. In July the capacity of the campground is exceeded on all weekends and is at or near capacity on many weekdays. April, May, June, September and October comprise the shoulder seasons in which campground occupancy rates typically range from below 10% to about 50%. Use during the balance of the year is low.

While there is a distinct peak in campground visits in July, the group-use area is most heavily used in June. Day-use visits peak in July, with a moderate decrease in August. The Victoria Day weekend in May is also a time when there are large numbers of visitors in the park, with the campground usually over capacity. This is also the case for the three other long weekends in the summer. On these weekends there are typically 100 - 130 camping units in the park, with overflow from the campground being accommodated in the day-use area.

Although the group-use site opened relatively recently in 1991, it is now almost continuously booked during June, July and August, and on weekends in May and September. The user groups typically come from communities all over southern Alberta.

Facility Supply Situation

Campground

- The demand for campsites exceeds the supply typically on all four summer long weekends by 25 - 55 sites. The nominal capacity of the campground is presently 75 sites.

- Overflow is accommodated in the park due to its remote and isolated location and the lack of camping alternatives in the immediate area or even the general region.

Day-use Area

- Although day-use is trending slightly upward, the existing facilities adequately accommodate demand.

Group-use Area

- The group-use area has proven to be very popular and is in high demand. For each of the long weekends in the summer, at least five or six requests to book the area have to be turned down. Solutions to this situation are considered in Section 8.0, Development Requirements.

3.0 SYSTEMS CONTEXT:

The purpose of this section is to describe the role Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park plays in the system of areas and sites managed by the Parks Program of Natural Resources Service. These sites and areas range from highly protected wilderness areas to highly developed recreation areas.

3.1 Classification

There are five types of land designations for protection and/or recreation that are the responsibility of the Natural Resources Service: Provincial Parks, Provincial Recreation Areas, Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas.

The purpose of provincial parks is defined in Section 3 of the Provincial Parks Act as follows:

Parks shall be developed and maintained

a) for the conservation and management of flora and fauna

b) for the preservation of specified areas and objects therein that are of geological, cultural, ecological or other scientific interest, and

c) to facilitate their use and enjoyment for outdoor recreation.

This definition is further refined in the Policy and Implementation Plan for Special Places 2000: Alberta's Natural Heritage:

> **Provincial Parks** are provincially significant natural and historical landscapes and features. A range of facilities along with interpretive and educational programs enhance opportunities for Albertans and tourists to explore, understand, appreciate and respect the natural environment and contribute to Alberta's growing tourism industry.

Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park matches very well these criteria for provincial park status. The park is rich with significant natural and historical landscapes and features. These include the native rock art, the police post, the sandstone hoodoos and cliffs, upland grasslands and riparian vegetation. The principal purpose for the park is the preservation of these attributes. The park also has a range of facilities and interpretive programs which enable visitors to appreciate these attributes. This combination of a distinctive landscape, a variety of resources and visitor facilities appropriate to the setting, all convenient to a major tourism highway, also enables the park to contribute to the tourism industry of the Milk River region.

3.2 Natural History Theme Representation

One of the guiding principles of Alberta Environmental Protection is to complete a system of Special Places. The identification, review and designation of these Special Places is based on a land classification system called Natural Regions and Natural History Themes. In the following the contribution made by Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park to the provincial system of Special Places is examined.

Natural Regions are recognized on the basis of broad differences in landscape patterns such as vegetation, soils and geology. The six Natural Regions in Alberta are further separated into 20 subregions. Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park is located in the Dry Mixedgrass Subregion of the Grassland Natural Region.

The Dry Mixedgrass subregion covers 45,957.0 sq. km. or 7.1% of the area of Alberta. Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park is one of six protected areas in the subregion which, when taken together, protect 1.2% of the subregion. Of the six protected areas Writing-On-Stone and Dinosaur Provincial Parks provide the most readily accessible opportunities for the public to appreciate a wide range of natural history themes and special features.

Within a given subregion the landscape is further analyzed on the basis of a three level system of Natural History Themes. The themes provide a way of describing and classifying a subregion in smaller units in terms of landscape and ecosystem complexes. Themes can also be categorized as being representative (typical or widely distributed features) or special (unique or atypical features). The three levels of themes are defined as:

Level I - broad, significant, easily recognizable landscape types containing a complex of physical and biological features (for example, an exposed slope or spring).

Level II - broad vegetation/habitat types that are also distinctive and relatively easy to recognize (for example, within an exposed slope, eroded bedrock would be a Level II Theme).

Level III - more narrowly defined features including very specific plant community types, microhabitat for less common species, individual species and specific landforms.

With the 1991 land base expansion, Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park now contributes the following Level I themes to the Special Places system.

Upland, non-sandy	-	Ground Moraine	5.00 sq. km
	-	Hummocky Moraine	3.00 sq. km
Upland, sandy	-	Sandy Plain	1.50 sq. km
Valley/Ridge	-	Exposed Slope	2.00 sq. km
	-	Protected Slope	3.00 sq. km
	-	Floor/Stream	2.50 sq. km

For the Dry Mixedgrass subregion the most significant gaps in representation of Level I themes are:

Upland	-	non-sandy	- glacial lake bed
			- ground moraine
			- hummocky moraine
Valley/Ridge	-	floor/stream	
	-	springs	
Wetland	-	wet meadow	
	-	shallow marsh	
	-	deep marsh	
	-	alkali wetland	

Should land in the park vicinity become available, and the opportunity exists for its inclusion into the park, it will be evaluated for the degree to which it could improve representation of these themes.

At Level II the park makes a contribution in the protection of several themes:

- Brown chernozemic soils in grassland on ground moraine.
- Un-/lightly grazed grassland on ground moraine.
- Ravines within exposed slopes.

In addition, there is some representation present for 25 other Level II themes.

There are two Level II themes presently unrepresented in the park with the potential to be so by means of changes in management practices. These are:

- heavily grazed grassland on sandy plain
- recently burned grassland on sandy plain

The possibility for creating these Level II themes is discussed in Section 4.0, Zoning, in the Natural Environment Zone. These themes are, however, well represented at the Middle Sand Hills National Wildlife Area.

There is only one Level II theme that has some representation at the park that is not also represented at other sites. This is the clear stream theme, which is represented by Police Creek. This theme is uncommon in the Grasslands Region.

Police Coulee has been identified in the Alberta Protected Areas System Analysis (1994) as a special feature within the Milk River Ecosystem. This feature is well represented in the park so this indicates a special contribution the park makes to the protected areas system of Alberta.

3.3 Special and Unique Features

In addition to contributing to targets for natural history theme representation, Writing-On-Stone plays a key role in Alberta's system of special places due to the many special and unique features found in the park. These are described below:

3.3.1 Geological and Geomorphic Features

- Outcrops of the Milk River Formation
  - not common on Canadian Prairies
  - only protected examples are in Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park
  - geological type section is located in Police Coulee

    (A geological type section is the original description of a sequence of strata that constitutes a stratigraphic unit. It serves as a standard reference against which all other exposures are compared.)
- Unique and spectacular sandstone hoodoos.

3.3.2 Aquatic Features

- The Milk River is the only river in Alberta that drains into the Gulf of Mexico. Consequently it provides habitat for several species not found in other Alberta river systems including Silvery Minnows and Stonecats.
- Police Creek is a special feature by virtue of being a clear, permanent stream, a rare feature in the dry mixedgrass or mixedgrass grassland. It supports a population of the rare (in Alberta) Brassy Minnow.

3.3.3 Vegetation Features

- An usually large variety of plant species are found in the park area due to the combined influences of the Sweetgrass Hills, Milk River and surrounding grasslands.
- Among this assemblage of plant species are several rare species:
  - nodding umbrella plant (Eriogonum cernuum), American pellitory (Parieteria pensylvanica), little-seeded rice grass (Oryzopsis micrantha), green milkweed (Asclepias viridiflora), Moquin's see-blite (Suaeda moquinii), prickly milk-vetch (Astragalus kentrophyta), low milk-vetch (Astragalus lotiflorus), western hawksbeard (Crepis occidentalis), tufted hymenopappus (Hymenopappus filifoluis), red three-awn (Aristida longiseta), six-week fescue (Vulpia ocotoflora), downy paintbrush (Castilleja sessiliflora).

3.3.4 Wildlife Features

- The combination of diverse and unique habitats, within the influence of several ecosystems, results in the diverse populations of wildlife.

- The park supports a population of 50 - 100 Weidermeyer's admiral butterflies, which are rare in Canada.

- Bushy-tailed woodrats and yellow-bellied marmots are found in the park, although they are not typically found on the grasslands since they are primarily found in the foothills and mountain regions.

- Hibernacula for prairie rattlesnakes and bull snakes are found in the park.

- The sandstone coulee walls provide nesting habitat for a high density of birds of prey including prairie falcon, golden eagle and ferruginous hawk.

3.3.5 Visual Resource Features

- The major landscape features within and around the park are sandstone hoodoos and cliffs, the Sweetgrass Hills, the Milk River Valley, badlands and undisturbed upland prairie. Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park contains some of the most spectacular and inspiring natural landscapes on the Canadian prairies. These landscapes are an invaluable piece of Alberta's natural heritage and provide rare and visual reference to pre-settlement conditions on the plains.

3.3.6 Historical Resource Features

- The native rock art is the park's most significant and compelling feature. Its protection and interpretation will continue to be a predominant management concern.

- The re-constructed North West Mounted Police Post provides an additional element of historical interest. The original post buildings were destroyed by fire shortly after being abandoned in 1918, and the main post building was reconstructed in 1974.

- There are also some etchings done by police members and other Europeans that have historical interest (eg. Signature Rock).

3.4 General Park Objectives

This section presents general objectives to be met in the management of Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park. Objectives are stated for the principal natural and cultural history attributes of the park, including significant and special features. These are organized within four broad objectives: Preservation, Outdoor Recreation, Heritage Appreciation and Tourism/Economic Development.

These objectives are explained in general terms for the provincial protected areas system as follows:

Preservation:	To designate natural landscapes that preserve the full range of environmental diversity and special natural features of Alberta.
Outdoor Recreation:	To include natural landscapes throughout Alberta that ensure opportunities for a variety of resource-based, dispersed recreation pursuits.
Heritage Appreciation:	To include landscapes that ensure, for all Albertans and visitors, the opportunity to explore, understand

	and appreciate the full range of Alberta's natural heritage.
Tourism/Economic Development:	To include areas capable of supporting tourism infrastructure and sustaining long-term economic viability of adventure travel and ecotourism, including extended tours in unspoiled natural landscapes.

3.4.1 Preservation

- To preserve the native and historical rock art, other archaeological and historic resources and the sandstone hoodoos and cliffs from damage or deterioration that can be attributed to the actions of people, directly or indirectly.
- To research techniques and to apply these techniques, if feasible, on an experimental basis on a limited scale to protect rock art from natural weathering.
- To protect Police Coulee from disturbance in view of its significance as a hydrological and geological feature and as important wildlife habitat, especially for nesting raptors.
- To manage and preserve the natural history themes of the park in order that representation of the Dry Mixedgrass Subregion can be maintained.
- To preserve the natural and historic visual landscape within the park (particularly from the main viewpoints and interpretive areas) from artificial intrusions.

3.4.2 Heritage Appreciation

- To convey to all visitors an appreciation and respect for the native rock art.
- To recognize the spiritual significance of this area to the Blackfoot people and the central role natives have played in creating its special mystique and character.
- To provide opportunities for the Blackfoot people to visit the rock art sites in a manner that is in accordance with their own ways and to provide means to permit ongoing ceremonial and spiritual use of this site.
- To increase the involvement of the Blackfoot people in interpretive programs to ensure a Blackfoot perspective is provided, to enrich the experience for non-natives and to provide opportunities for the Blackfoot people to provide cultural education to their own people.
- To increase visitors' understanding of the historical activities in the area, including the N.W.M.P. post history and the early ranching and settlement period.
- To provide visitors an opportunity to enjoy, through walks and hikes, the natural features of the area including the main Milk River valley, typical side coulees and areas of upland grassland.
- To interpret, primarily offsite and from overlooks, the special natural themes and features of Police Coulee.
- To provide park visitors of all physical abilities with opportunities to learn about and appreciate the human and natural history of the park at all times of the year.

Interpretation

The interpretive program is one of the key services provided at the park. The general objective will be to strive to give all park visitors the opportunity to participate in a guided tour of the rock art sites during the peak summer months of June through September. Achieving this

objective will be a challenge in light of budget restrictions and the ability to hire and train interpretive staff. Interpretation of subjects other than the rock art will be regarded as a lower priority.

The main themes of interpretation to be presented at the park are:

1. Rock Art

   - as explained by the science of archaeology
   - as explained by Blackfoot legend

   (both systems of understanding will be presented as equally significant)

2. Natural History

   - ecology and species of the grassland and riparian habitats
   - the Milk River and the Mississippi River watershed
   - geology including the sandstone hoodoos, badlands and Sweetgrass Hills.

3. Human History

   - native history - both pre- and post-European contact (as explained by both anthropology and Blackfoot history).
   - ranching and settlement period
   - the N.W.M.P. post.

3.4.3 Outdoor Recreation

- To continue to provide a campground, without change in general character, but one with a fixed capacity in consideration of the ecological and social carrying capacity of the site.
- To encourage the development by other agencies or interests of additional campsites in the Milk River area to supplement the campsites available at the park.
- To provide a small, pleasant picnic area, for traditional local use with the existing type and level of facilities.
- To continue to provide the existing group camp with no major changes and to encourage development of group camp facilities elsewhere in the region.
- To provide park visitors with opportunities to hike in and explore the coulees and grasslands south of the Milk River.

3.4.4 Tourism/Economic Development

- To achieve a position for the park that realizes its potential in the regional tourism industry, while ensuring the park attributes that provide the tourism attraction: the native rock art, settlement history and unique scenic landscapes are protected from impairment that could compromise their value.
- To work in connection with the local tourism industry to ensure visitors drawn into the region by the special qualities of the park have a positive and rewarding experience throughout their visit.

4.0 PARK LAND MANAGEMENT ZONES:

Within the park there are lands which share common resource attributes, requiring common management approach in order to preserve these resources. There are also lands used presently for visitor and maintenance facilities to enable the public to enjoy and appreciate the park.

In order to define the appropriate types of land management in various areas of the park, three zones have been delineated, each of which has a distinct set of management objectives and guidelines. These zones are: Historical Protection, Facility and Natural Environment. The delineation of the zones is shown on Map 4.

The Historic Protection Zone encompasses the area with the greatest concentration of native rock art and features from the historic period. This is centered around the Rock Art Wall and the mouths of Police and Van Cleeve Coulees.

The Facility Zone is the area of the park dedicated to intensive visitor use (picnicking, camping and group-use camping) and the area utilized for maintenance facilities, staff housing and other infrastructure.

The Facility Zone is a confirmation of the existing situation in terms of where the current facilities are located. In view of desired visitor experiences, traditional uses, the existing and acceptable impacts on the park environment, it is intended the existing facilities will remain as presently located.

The remainder of the park, not included in the previous two zones, is placed in the Natural Environment Zone. This zone provides for protection and management of natural landscapes and species, while permitting a variety of dispersed, low impact outdoor recreation activities and providing visitors with the opportunity to learn about and appreciate the environment.

The following more detailed descriptions of each of the three zones are organized at the first level in terms of four broad objectives: Preservation, Heritage Appreciation, Outdoor Recreation and Tourism/Economic Development.

There are a number of park management subjects that are common to all the zones. To avoid repeating these in the discussion of each zone, these are described in a separate, umbrella section entitled: Park-wide Management Direction.

At Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park the extreme susceptibility of the rock art to thoughtless or even malicious damage is the dominate concern in park management. The problem of damage to the rock art is primarily a function of public access. Due to the importance of this topic to the protection of rock art, the question of public access is dealt with as a separate topic where required.

4.1 PARK-WIDE MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Preservation

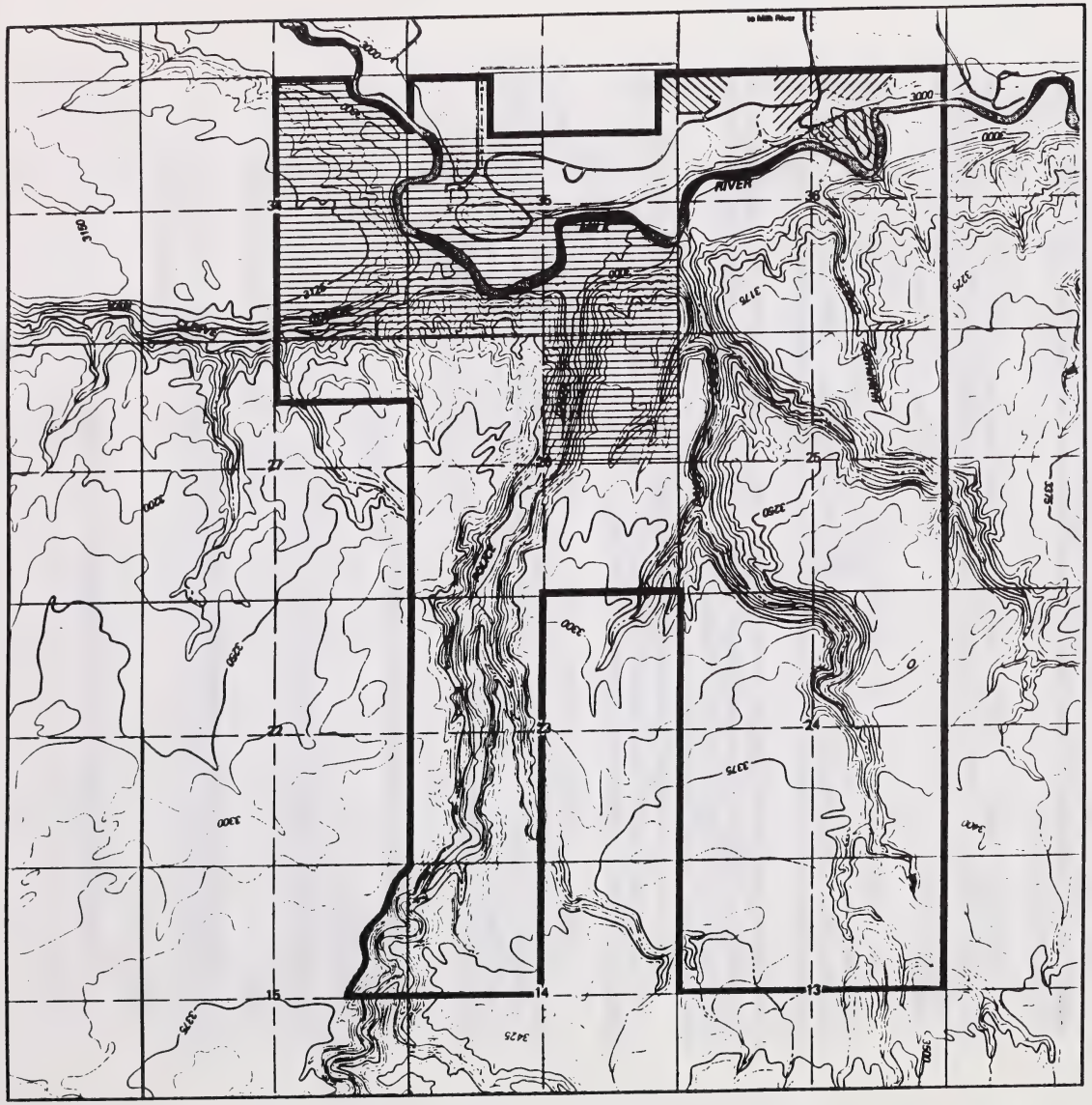
Vegetation and Wildlife Management

Issue

- The presence of rare species may be identified.

Objectives

- To ensure rare species are given a high level of protection



WRITING-ON-STONE PROVINCIAL PARK

MANAGEMENT PLAN

MAP 4

LAND MANAGEMENT ZONES

- Historical Protection
- Facility
- Natural Environment (all other areas)
- Conditional Facility (potential visitor centre site)

PARK BOUNDARY

SCALE 1:25 000

0 m 500 1000 1500 m

NORTH

TOWNSHIP 1 RANGE 12, 13 WEST OF THE 4th MERIDIAN

- To increase public awareness of rare species

Guidelines

- If rare species are identified in the park, they will be reported to the Alberta Natural Heritage Information Centre.
- Management strategies will be prepared as required to ensure rare species are protected.
- Critical sites or habitat (eg. snake hibernacula) will be identified only to qualified scientists engaged in approved research.

4.2 HISTORICAL PROTECTION ZONE:

4.2.1 Preservation

Historical Resource Management

Issues

- The native rock art is a priceless and irreplaceable resource, once it is damaged it can never be repaired.
- Vandalism continues to be a problem, despite education and enforcement efforts.
- Natural erosion of the sandstone cliffs continues, with long-term effects on the rock art.
- Land brought into the park in 1991 (i.e. Van Cleeve and Police Coulees) contains rock art requiring special protection.
- An area surrounding one concentration of rock art is designated as an Historical Resource under the Historical Resources Act and in this area and the surrounding area a Ministerial Order under the Provincial Parks Act restricts public access.
- Cattle occasionally stray into the park from private and leased Crown land west of the park with potential damage to rock art (resulting from rubbing against the rock).

Objectives

- To protect the core values of the park: the native rock art sites and historical features.

Actions

- To help deter vandalism to the rock art, the existing Provincial Historical Resource designation will be expanded to encompass all of the Historical Protection Zone. The zone will then also encompass important rock art located within the land incorporated into the park in 1991.
- The existing Ministerial Order under the Provincial Parks Act for the purpose of restricting public access will be amended to encompass most of the Historical Protection Zone. (There are some areas of upland grassland to which public access need not be restricted, but which are included in the Provincial Historical Resource. This is the result of the requirement that the designation extend to quarter-section boundaries at this site.)

  (The designation of an area into which public access is restricted requires extensive regulatory review within government. The recommended additions to the existing Restricted Access Area must be regarded as proposals only until this review is complete.)

- The designation of the Provincial Historic Resource is a reflection of the interest of the Dept. of Community Development in the joint protection, study and interpretation of these important resources. A positive working relationship between the Natural Resources Service and the Archaeological Survey of Alberta will be continued and fostered.

- A special case will be public access to the rodeo grounds on the occasion of rodeos and related activities in accordance with the lease. In this case the public will continue to have access to the rodeo grounds.

- Techniques are now available involving the use of special materials that show potential for the protection of rock art. Such materials may slow considerably the weathering of the rock art. These techniques will be tried on an experimental and limited basis on high-risk rock art. This will be done only after consultation with the Blackfoot Nation to ensure spiritually valued rock art is not used for testing. This preservation work will be undertaken under the leadership of the Archaeological Survey of Alberta.

- Fencing will be improved, to prevent cattle from straying into the park. Trespass cattle will be removed immediately from the area.

Aquatic Resources Management

Issues

- The Milk River in the vicinity of the police post site continues to erode at the south bank which in future will threaten the police post site.

- Bank erosion also from time to time reveals native campsites and artifacts which provides an opportunity for research and interpretation.

Objectives

- To document a policy regarding the effects of bank erosion by the Milk River on historical resources.

Actions

- The rate of erosion of the riverbank in the vicinity of the police post site will be monitored to determine the rate of erosion and to predict a time frame in which the site could be threatened. Monitoring will continue until either the bank is stabilized or facilities are determined to not be at risk. It is recognized that the site itself has historical significance, more so than the reconstructed buildings.

- The Archaeological Survey of Alberta will continue to monitor the riverbank for archaeological material exposed by erosion.

Vegetation Resource Management

Issues

- The rock art and police post reconstruction could be permanently damaged by fire.

- Vegetation close to the base of cliffs can damage rock art by sweeping against it.

Objectives

- To ensure historical resources are protected from damage by fire or other controllable factors.

Actions

- All fires will be immediately extinguished.
- Smoking will not be permitted.
- The area around the police post will be rough mown.
- The current practice of periodically removing brush near rock art will continue.

Visual Resource Management

Issues

- Much of this zone can be viewed from the Police Coulee viewpoint, the premier viewpoint in the park, and in consideration of the importance of history to the purpose of the park, a historical landscape should be maintained.
- The rodeo grounds are located in the zone immediately adjacent to the rock art wall, the prime location for interpretation. To prevent vandalism and other depreciative behaviors, a chain link fence is in place to restrict access to the rock art area and hoodoos. The rodeo grounds and fence are a visual intrusion on the historical landscape of the zone.

Objective

- To provide for park visitors the opportunity to experience the historical landscape with a minimum of intrusions of modern facilities.

Actions

- All management activities or developments will be carried out in such way as to minimize visual intrusions in the zone and in areas visible from the zone.
- If at some future time an arrangement can be made that is satisfactory to the interested parties, the rodeo grounds and chain link fence will be removed.

4.2.2 Heritage Appreciation

Issues

- The opportunity to view and learn about the archaeological and historical features is a key attraction to the park.
- It is important that all features (and particularly the rock art) be interpreted as accurately as possible, using the best available knowledge.
- The reconstructed N.W.M.P. post is an important part of the interpretation of the park's history. The reconstructed buildings are only a few of the buildings that were originally on the site. Although the existing buildings were reconstructed with great care to be accurate historical re-creations, current thinking in the field of historical preservation is that it is preferable to interpret a site without re-creating buildings in order to protect the site and archaeological resources.
- Access to the police post site for interpretive tours requires wading across the Milk River. This has come to be regarded as an enriching and positive part of the experience for visitors.

- Members of the Blackfoot Nation have expressed interest in having access to the rock art sites on their own at times of their own choosing for ceremonial and spiritual purposes.

- A significant feature of Police Coulee is raptor nesting that occurs there; however, this nesting can be sensitive to disturbance.

- Hiking opportunities into Police Coulee are increasingly sought after.

- Providing hikers access to the coulee through the Restricted Access Area would present an enforcement and administrative challenge.

- The presence of the rodeo grounds and the associated chain-link fence required to protect the rock art from damage detracts from the appreciation and enjoyment of the historical landscape and features.

Objectives

- To continue to provide park visitors with opportunities to view, learn about and appreciate the native rock art and historical elements in the zone.

- To continue to give visitors a memorable and enriching experience.

- To ensure historical resources are not damaged.

- To ensure natives from tribes that are believed to have an ancestral connection to the rock art are encouraged to visit the park and able to visit sacred sites (i.e. rock art) and carry out ceremonies in a way that suits their needs.

Actions

- The Archaeological Survey of Alberta will assist in the training of interpreters.

- The existing facilities for interpretation in the zone will remain, including the access road (gated), toilet, trails, viewing platforms and the reconstructed police post.

- Guided interpretive tours will continue to be conducted in this zone, primarily to the rock art wall and the N.W.M.P. post site.

- No additional buildings will be reconstructed at the police post site. Visitors will be given an understanding of this aspect of the park's history through other interpretive means such as photographs, maps and drawings.

- While consideration has been given to some form of river crossing (eg. bridge, cable car) for access to the police post site, the planned intention is to remain with the current situation. That is, visitors will continue to wade across the river on interpretive tours. This is appreciated by visitors as a unique and distinctive part of the experience. A bridge would have several problematic aspects particularly intrusion on the historical landscape.

- Park visitors will be provided access to the zone only on guided interpretive tours under supervision of park staff or with special written permission of the Ranger-In-Charge. The Ranger-In-Charge will have the authority to exercise discretion regarding such special permission. Permission will generally <u>not</u> be provided for visits to native rock art sites.

- Operators of commercial tours may be able to obtain a permit (Permit for Commercial Guiding or Instructing of Outdoor Activities) to guide clients to areas and features in the Restricted Access Area, but not to native rock art sites. Native rock art sites may be visited only under the guidance and control of park staff. Applications for permits may be obtained from the Ranger-In-Charge.

- Park staff will arrange for the existing Ministerial Order be amended to be in accordance with the above guidelines.

- Most of the Historical Protection Zone will be identified as a Restricted Access Area (see Map 7), and so designated by Ministerial Order.

- Natives from the tribes of the northern Great Plains will be permitted to enter the Restricted Access Area unsupervised for spiritual and educational purposes, provided the Ranger-In-Charge is advised beforehand of their visit and proposed activities. Park policies and regulations must be abided by.

4.2.3. Outdoor Recreation

Issues

- River trips on the Milk River through the zone have long been popular with the local population and visitors from outside the area. Canoes, rafts, tubes and kayaks are all used.

- Police Coulee, which was brought into the park in 1991, provides an opportunity to hike and explore a unique and fascinating landscape. (Other coulees south of the Milk River also provide similar opportunities. Their management is discussed in the Natural Environment Zone section.)

- The presence of people in the zone pursuing recreation activities contains some risk of irreversible damage to irreplaceable resources.

- The rodeos held at the rodeo grounds are a strong local tradition and the rodeo association has an investment in the physical plant (eg. stands, access road, corrals).

Objectives

- To accommodate outdoor recreation activities that are consistent with the other objectives of the zone.

Actions

- No trails will be developed in Police Coulee. This approach is taken in order to retain the wilderness character, and to not actively facilitate use in view of the sensitivity of the area and to limit the demand for access through the Restricted Access Area. The impacts of hikers in the coulee will be closely monitored.

- Visitors wishing to hike in Police Coulee by access through the coulee mouth will be required to obtain written permission from the Ranger-In-Charge. Such permission will be required to monitor and control the presence of unsupervised visitors in the Restricted Access Area, and also to prevent disturbance of nesting raptors. Other conditions for access to Police Coulee are discussed in the Natural Environment Zone Section.

- Visitors entering the park on the Milk River will not be permitted to land in the Restricted Access Area to access the protected features without prior written permission from the Ranger-In-Charge. Signs will be prominently placed on the bank in the Restricted Access Area.

- The rodeo grounds will remain where they are and operate as they have. However, they will be categorized as a non-conforming use within the Historical Protection Zone.

4.2.4 Tourism/Economic Development

Issues

- The park possesses qualities capable of attracting visitors from the urban centres, towns and rural areas of southern Alberta. These qualities are the hoodoos, the archaeological

and historic resources and the Milk River. The Historical Protection Zone contains most of these attributes.

- Since visits to the archaeological and historic features can generally occur only while on a guided tour, the number of guided tours can be a limiting factor to meeting the expectations of visitors.

Objectives

- To enable the park to contribute to tourism in the region to the extent possible without damage to park resources.

- To provide visitors to the park with a quality opportunity to experience and appreciate the park environment and its features.

Actions

- The demand for guided tours will be closely monitored.

- Should the demand consistently exceed the delivery capability (eg. due to staff shortage) steps will be taken to try to rectify the situation.

- The private sector may wish to develop camping, fixed roof accommodation, (eg. bed and breakfast), dude ranch and other commercial service opportunities in the region to help accommodate visitors to the area drawn by the historical and natural attractions of the Milk River valley.

4.3 FACILITY ZONE:

4.3.1 Preservation

Geological and Geomorphological Resource Management

Issues

- The hoodoos located adjacent to the valley bottom facility area are very attractive for exploring and are at high risk of being scarred by graffiti.

Objectives

- To provide visitors with the unique and memorable experience of exploring the hoodoos, while protecting the hoodoos from vandalism.

Actions

- In contacts with park visitors, whether personal or non-personal, the message will be reinforced that carving graffiti is inappropriate and illegal and that a "zero tolerance" approach applies to graffiti. Rangers will periodically patrol the hoodoos to convey this message. Scrambling on the hoodoos will be regarded as a natural and important part of visitors' experience.

- Means will be investigated whereby graffiti could be removed or concealed.

Aquatic Resource Management

Issues

- The quality of the water in the Milk River is often poor in the hot summer months, when the water level is low and the number of park visitors (especially children) wishing to wade

or swim in the river is high. The poor water quality is due to high fecal coliform counts and attributed largely to livestock operations upstream.

Objectives

- To recognize the desire of park visitors for water contact recreation.

Actions

- Water quality will continue to be monitored weekly.
- Signs will be placed when water quality is unacceptable for water contact recreation advising visitors that swimming is not recommended.
- The existing beach will be maintained.

Vegetation Resource Management

Issues

- The native plains cottonwood forest is relatively even-aged and is at an age where the trees will start to deteriorate. The cottonwood trees are tremendous asset in the zone due to the shade and wildlife habitat they provide. The cottonwood are not regenerating naturally.
- Some of the tree cover consists of species not native to the park (eg. spruce), which affects the character of the landscape.

Objectives

- To sustain a healthy canopy of cottonwood trees in the valley bottom facility area.
- To have a sustainable natural landscape of native plants.

Actions

- A program will be carried out from time-to-time throughout the valley-bottom facility area to plant cottonwoods. The planting will be done to create new canopy where required and to provide a future replacement canopy. In 1994 about 50 cottonwoods (75 mm dia 300 mm above ground) were planted in the day-use area. Larger nursery-stock trees have better chances of survival.
- With the exception of irrigated turf grass in the picnic area and group-use area, only native species will be used for reclamation and landscaping.

Wildlife Management

Issues

- On average about ten times each year rattlesnakes are removed by park rangers from the campground or day-use area. The rattlesnakes are relocated to remote low-use areas of the park.
- Signs are present in many locations throughout the park advising visitors of the presence of rattlesnakes and safety precautions.
- Rattlesnakes can, if cornered or threatened, be a danger to humans.

- Rattlesnakes have been the target in a long history of ill-advised and unnecessary extermination. In the past, in human/rattlesnake encounters, the rattlesnake was usually killed.

- Like all species, rattlesnakes are protected in the park.

Objective

- To meet public safety needs while respecting the value of rattlesnakes as a part of the natural ecology of the park.

Actions

- The current management practices will be continued as they satisfactorily meet public safety needs while avoiding rattlesnake deaths.

Visual Resource Management

Issues

- The panoramic views of a substantially natural-appearing prairie landscape is an important part of visitors' experience.

- The location of the staff residences and maintenance facilities on prairie level represents a moderate intrusion on the visual quality of the park.

Objectives

- To protect the visual experience of a natural prairie landscape from key viewpoints and travel routes.

Actions

- Shrub planting will be carried out to augment existing plantings around the staff housing and maintenance facilities to help reduce the visual impacts of these facilities.

- Any modifications to the facilities in the valley bottom, or additions of new facilities, will be carried out such that visual intrusion is avoided or minimized in the area visible from the entrance viewpoint.

4.3.2 Heritage Appreciation

Issues

- The facility zone is the area most intensively used by park visitors, which provides the opportunity to effectively contact visitors with interpretation and information.

- Much of the traditional day-use in the park has been more for the purpose of enjoying a picnic in pleasant shady setting, than for appreciation of the unique qualities of the park.

- With the core values of the park (the rock art) located in the Restricted Access Area, opportunities to appreciate them have been restricted to guided tours.

- The contact point for visitors and interpretive staff is a work camp style trailer mounted on skids. This does not create a favorable first impression.

- There are many valuable artifacts, photos and other items available which would add greatly to visitors' appreciation of the park, but which must be stored and presented in a secure, weather-proof environment.

- Located near the interpreters' office is an outdoor theatre for interpretive presentations. This is a very basic, old facility, which similarly does not create a positive impression.

Objectives

- To ensure all visitors to the park are given the opportunity to learn about and appreciate the key qualities of the park.

- To present interpretive and information messages in a visually appealing fashion appropriate to the park setting that will give visitors a positive impression of the park and provincial parks in general.

Actions

- Interpretation will continue to be provided in this zone through programs at an outdoor theatre and through interpretive signs.

- In 1994 an outdoor interpretive and information site was completed in the day-use area. This facility enables all visitors to the park to obtain, on their own, key information about the park and region and also the principal interpretive messages about the park. This facility enables disabled visitors to study presentations about the rock art, which would be very difficult for them to do on a guided tour. Also, visitors during the off-season when tours are not available are now able to gain an appreciation of the park.

- An interpretive centre is proposed for the park. The centre would combine several functions to better serve park visitors, including:

  (1) Internal exhibit, display and interpretation (including a theatre) areas for year-round use.

  (2) On-site office space for park interpreters and rangers providing direct contact with visitors.

  (3) Information counter and distribution point for bus tour tickets.

  A possible location for the facility would be in the day-use area, where it would be available to visitors in the campground, day-use and group-use areas. Alternative sites are available on the upland prairie level near the park entrance. The proposed visitor centre is discussed in greater detail in Section 8.0, Development Requirements.

- The trailhead for the self-guided Hoodoos interpretive trail is located near the group-use area, but the entrance to the trail is somewhat obscure. The trailhead sign will be relocated and upgraded in order to be more visible and attractive.

4.3.3 Outdoor Recreation

Issues

- The facility zone provides a pleasant setting for campers, day-users and group campers. However, the area available for these purposes is fully exploited.

- The campground is largely used in a random pattern, with some individual sites. The random use pattern has the advantage of allowing visitors to camp in social groups, a feature which many visitors find appealing. However, the disadvantage is that there is no control over the maximum number of camping units on the campground, resulting in overcrowding. This both damages the campground landscape and detracts from the quality of the experience.

- The facility zone serves as a staging area for hiking and river trips.

Objectives

- To continue to provide the existing level of camping, day-use and group-use facilities and to strive for a high level of satisfaction among visitors with their experience of a visit to the park.

- To provide visitors with accurate information on recreation opportunities in the park and surrounding region.

- To accommodate outdoor recreation activities that are compatible with the primary park objective: to protect cultural and natural resources.

Actions

- The campground will be renovated to establish designated sites. Although it cannot be confirmed until a design is finalized, it is expected about 75 designated campsites can be accommodated without significantly changing the character or environment of the existing campsites. A design will be prepared that still provides flexibility to visitors to camp in social groups, as in the past, in order to retain the positive aspects of the existing situation. The provision of designated sites will result in less impact on the campground landscape and a better camping experience (by eliminating overcrowding). The presence of designated sites will also enable a campsite reservation system to be used, thereby also increasing visitor satisfaction by guaranteeing sites to those who reserve. (Campground improvements are discussed in greater detail in Section 8.0.)

- The existing day-use area will be retained as is. However, additional tree and shrub planting will be done in underutilized turf areas, in order to reduce maintenance costs and to increase wildlife habitat.

- The existing group-use area will be retained as is.

- The existing maintenance and staff housing area will be retained as is. Provision will be made to decrease the visual intrusion of these facilities through shrub planting around the site to serve as a visual barrier.

- Staging requirements of private sector tour operators (eg. river trips) whose objectives and practices are compatible with those of the park will be accommodated in the facility zone if their requirements would not impact the park landscape or the experience of park visitors. All existing regulations and policies must be adhered to. Operators will be allowed to place small advertisements or brochures on park information kiosks.

- The availability for backcountry hiking in the park will be made known to visitors, along with practical advice on hiking conditions. This will be done to increase visitors' appreciation and enjoyment of the park.

4.3.4 Tourism/Economic Development

Issues

- Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park is a key player on the tourism team of the Milk River region. It is possibly the only attractor capable of drawing visitors into the area from considerable distances. The facilities and the experience visitors find in the facility zone of the park will have much to do with the continuing ability of the park to contribute to tourism in the region.

- The park is identified as a Watchable Wildlife Site in the Alberta Wildlife Viewing Guide. This may contribute to attracting visitors to the area.

- The reason visitors are attracted to the park from outside the local area is the rock art, historical interests and the exceptional and unique natural landscape.

- On long weekends throughout the summer and during most of the month of July the campground operates at capacity and the overflow is accommodated temporarily elsewhere in the park (eg. in the day-use area).

- There are no other campgrounds in the immediate park vicinity that can provide an alternative destination in an overflow situation.

- There are very few alternative campgrounds in the region and even fewer opportunities that are of comparable quality to camping in the park.

- Many people travel considerable distances (eg. one to four hours) to camp in the park.

Objectives

- To continue to provide the necessary facilities for visitors to enjoy a visit to the park for the purpose of appreciating its cultural and natural qualities in order that the park will retain its position as an attraction capable of drawing visitors into the Milk River region.

Actions

- Only facilities necessary to support visits to the park in order to appreciate its natural qualities and cultural features will be provided. Facilities not necessary for this purpose will not be considered.

- Information facilities (eg. bulletin boards, brochure stands) will provide space for businesses to advertise services and other attractions available to tourists in the region. No advertising will be permitted that in anyway would detract from visitors' enjoyment of the park.

- Designated sites in the campground and a reservation system will help assure a quality experience for visitors, thereby encouraging more and repeat visitors to the region. The reservation system will be for only a certain number of sites, leaving some available for tourists passing through the region. Signs will be improved on S. R. 501 to advise visitors when the campground is full, thereby avoiding the frustration of being turned away at the park. A defined capacity campground at the park will increase demand for alternative camping in the region. This will represent an opportunity for the private sector or local agencies. (Campground improvements are discussed in greater detail in Section 8.0.). Once the campground has been reconstructed with a defined capacity, campground capacity will not be expanded in the park. Additional demand will be serviced by the private sector.

4.4 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT ZONE:

4.4.1 Preservation

Geological and Geomorphological Resource Management.

Issues:

- This zone includes sandstone cliffs and hoodoos that enclose the Milk River valley and Humphrey and Davis Coulees. These sandstones can also be vulnerable to vandalism in the form of graffiti.

- Increased hiking in the coulees south of the river may lead to damage to soils and vegetation. There are presently only informal paths resulting primarily from cattle and game over the years.

Objectives:

- To protect the unique landforms of the sandstone cliffs and hoodoos from vandalism.

- To protect soils and vegetation from unacceptable damage by hiking traffic or consequent wind and water erosion.

Actions:

- Park visitors will be advised in all forms of media of the importance of not damaging the sandstone cliffs and hoodoos, along with the fact that vandalism is an offense under the Provincial Parks Act and the Historical Resources Act. A "zero tolerance" approach will be taken regarding such vandalism.

- Hiking will be permitted in all areas of the Natural Environment Zone (with certain restrictions in Police Coulee, which are discussed under the heading of Outdoor Recreation). It is anticipated that the number of park visitors who will partake of this opportunity will be relatively small. Consequently, the existing game trails in the coulees will suffice for hiking purposes. However, staff will monitor for impacts from hiking traffic. There are no plans for trail development in the coulees or on the uplands in order to preserve their wild and natural character. However, this can be revisited if unacceptable impacts start to occur.

Vegetation Resource Management

Issues:

- As a result of its expansion in 1991, the park now contains substantial areas of upland grasslands south of the river. Landscape goals are required for these grasslands in terms of conservation biology and also in terms of fire hazard which is of concern to adjacent ranchers.

- The vegetation in the coulees provides a rich habitat for many species.

- It has been reported that annual brome grasses are invading some areas of the park.

Objectives:

- To maintain or create a diversity of habitat conditions on the upland grasslands south of the river in order to support a wide variety of plant and animal species that are typical of the Dry Mixed Grass and Mixed Grass natural subregions.

- To manage the vegetation in the park such that an exceptional or unusual fire hazard does not develop.

- To manage the vegetation such that weed infestations do not occur and that the requirements of the Weed Control Act are met.

- To manage the riparian vegetation in the coulees and in the Milk River valley such that the habitat potential of this vegetation is realized.

Actions:

- All fires that occur in the zone will be immediately suppressed. This will be accomplished by whatever means are available at the time, including use of the fire equipment based in the park, assistance from neighbors and County of Warner fire equipment. As much as possible and reasonably practical, fire suppression methods should avoid soil disturbance (eg. plowing fireguard).

- Following any fire that occurs, any physical soil disturbance resulting from use of equipment will be regraded to original conditions and allowed to revegetate naturally. Also, the burned area will be monitored to study the effect of fire on vegetation and animals.

- A grassland management system will be developed for the upland grasslands south of the Milk River and east of Police coulee. The system will be based on landscape goals for the purpose of promoting and maintaining biodiversity. The landscape goals and management system will be prepared in consultation with specialists such as ecologists and range scientists. The system will involve the use of grazing by domestic livestock. The use of bison for this purpose has been studied, but was found to be impractical for this relatively small land base. Haying may also be used as a management tool. However, it would be used only if remedial action is required to remove excessive standing dead material to successfully initiate an ecologically-based grazing system.

- As with all public lands, the process for selecting grazing or haying permittees will be fair and open.

- Any grazing system that is developed would involve the placement of temporary fencing to keep cattle out of the coulees, river valley or other sites to protect vegetation, the quality of experience for visitors and special or unique plant or animal species.

- If necessary, a watering site for cattle may need to be developed in the area.

- Grassland management on park land leased for grazing west of Police Coulee will continue as provided for in the lease. This lease is part of land acquisition arrangements for the park expansion in 1991. The grazing practice is light winter grazing.

- Park staff will investigate the extent and seriousness of a reported invasion of annual brome grasses, as well as means of control. The presence of other weeds will also be investigated. Maintenance of a healthy stand of native vegetation is believed to be the most practical and effective means of preventing weed problems. Weed control will be carried as required to meet the conditions of the Weed Control Act in a fashion suited to the severity of the problem to avoid or minimize effects on the park environment.

- North of the river a grazing system is not indicated due to the proximity of the Facility Zone, the high number of visitors in the area and the relatively small area involved. Fire control is less of a concern due to quick access being available for park fire equipment. These grasslands will serve as an example of Dry Mixed Grass prairie in ungrazed condition.

- The above two management conditions will be incorporated into the overall management approach for the grasslands.

Wildlife Resource Management

Issues:

- By 1992 the mule deer population in the region of the park had grown to the point where adjacent landholders were suffering a significant nuisance factor and serious crop depredation. Between 1993 and 1995 hunting was permitted in the park south of the Milk River for antlerless deer for the purpose of reducing the mule deer population from about 1,200 to about 450 within Wildlife Management Unit 104. (The bulk of these animals were located in and around the park.) This hunting was part of a coordinated effort to achieve this goal and coincided with the regular hunting season. Deer permits were almost doubled for hunting outside the park and landholders who had not been allowing hunting on their land or leases did so. Hunting in the park occurred only on foot. Park staff assisted the hunt by using park vehicles on existing trails to retrieve game.

- The park provides habitat for a number of species that are rare in Alberta, due either to the diminishing area of mixed grass prairie, or to the species being at the northern limit of their range. For most of these species the coulee shrubbery, riparian vegetation or sandstone cliffs provide critical habitat. For many the surrounding native grasslands are critical feeding and foraging areas.

- The sandstone cliffs, particularly in Police Coulee but also in other coulees and the river valley, provide nesting habitat for raptors, which are very sensitive to disturbance during nesting.

- The possibility of re-introducing bison to the park has been under discussion for some time.

- Some hibernacula for rattlesnakes and bull snakes are known, and there may be others. These are very sensitive to disturbance and vital to the survival of these species.

Objectives:

- To maintain a diversity of faunal species characteristic of the mixed grasslands.

- To monitor and manage populations of wildlife with a view to preventing unacceptable impacts on other park resources or adjacent land uses.

- To manage wildlife and human activities to the extent necessary to minimize threats to human safety.

- To minimize the impacts of human activities on wildlife.

Actions:

- The mule deer hunting will not be continued over the long-term as a recreational hunt. The hunting was a short-term management tool.

- Public access to Police Coulee will be restricted between mid-April and mid-July, in order to avoid disturbance of nesting raptors. Similar restrictions may also be imposed in the vicinity of other "occasional" nesting sites elsewhere. The entire area of Police Coulee south of the Historical Protection Zone will be included in the Restricted Access Area for this purpose (see Map 7). As discussed previously, visitors wishing to gain access to this area will be required to obtain a permit from the Ranger-In-Charge. This will enable visitor traffic into the Historical Protection Zone to be controlled, and also to ensure access to Police Coulee is available only when appropriate from a wildlife protection perspective. A permit will always be required for access to the coulee through the permanent Restricted Access Area.

  (The designation of an area into which public access is restricted requires extensive regulatory review within government. The recommended additions to the existing Restricted Access Area must be regarded as proposals only until this review is complete.)

- Sandstone cliffs and hoodoos, riparian areas and coulee shrubbery are vital to maintaining habitat in the park. These areas will not be disturbed.

- The feasibility of re-introducing bison to the park, particularily south of the river, has been investigated. Due to a number of factors, including the configuration and size of the park land base and the problems of managing bison, it has been concluded that such a re-introduction is not practical at this time.

- The locations of known rattlesnake and bull snake hibernacula will be provided only to qualified scientists engaged in approved research.

Historical Resource Management

Issues:

- The majority of historical resources in the park lie within the Historical Protection Zone, however, there are also numerous historical resources (including rock art, fossils and abandoned homesteads) in the Natural Environment Zone south of the Milk River. These resources will be accessible by the general public and could be vulnerable to damage.

- There are a number of rock art sites north of the river between the campground and the Historical Protection Zone. These are accessible from the Hoodoo Trail and therefore at risk of damage by graffiti.

Objectives:

- To enable the visitors to hike and explore in the Natural Environment Zone without risk of damage to historic resources.

- To enable visitors to view some rock art sites without the requirement of going on a guided tour.

Actions:

- The locations of rock art or fossil sites in this zone will not be publicized in order to not focus attention on these sites.

- Historical period features (eg. homesteads) in the zone will be interpreted by means of on-site signs, which will also carry the message that the sites are not to be disturbed.

- One of the largest rock art panels, the "Battle Scene" is available for viewing by visitors while on their own. However, the site is well protected with a fence enclosure. Similar security measures may be considered at other rock art sites accessible from the Hoodoos Trail.

Visual Resource Management

Issues:

- The scenic landscapes of the park and its surroundings are one of the most important experiences of a visit to the park. The most distinctive parts of the landscape are:

    1. Milk River valley, and coulees including sandstone cliffs and hoodoos.

    2. Sweetgrass Hills in the distance to the south.

    3. The vast panorama of upland grasslands with few visual intrusions, creating the sensation of viewing the original prairie.

- Almost all of the park and surrounding land is visible from the Natural Environment Zone. Of particular importance are the two main viewpoints which are located on the upland prairie level north of the river. All park visitors will pass at least one of these sites.

Objectives:

- To protect the sense of viewing a vast sweep of original native grassland that is presently available from the viewpoints, and also other areas in the park.

- To protect the views of an historical landscape in the Historical Protection Zone, particularly as viewed from the Police Coulee viewpoint.

- To minimize visual intrusions of facilities in the Facility Zone particularly as viewed from the entrance viewpoint.

Actions:

- Any modifications made to the upland prairie landscape south of the river (eg. water development, fencing) will be carried out in a way that visual intrusions are not perceptible from the main viewpoints.

- Any modifications made in the Historical Protection Zone must be historically accurate re-creations, or hidden from the view from the Police Coulee viewpoint.

- Any modifications made in the Facility Zone in the river valley must be carried out in a way that they are either hidden from view from the entrance viewpoint, or designed to be complementary to the river valley landscape in form, texture and colour.

- Plantings will be done around the maintenance and housing area to lessen this visual intrusion.

- Park staff will maintain contact with adjacent landowners, the County of Warner and leaseholders to engender support for protecting the natural scenic views within the area visible from the park. For instance, should any new installations be planned, steps could be taken to design it in terms of siting, colour and form to help it blend into the landscape. The areas of greatest concern are those between southeast and southwest as viewed from the main viewpoints.

- Located along the road to the Police Coulee viewpoint is a bench and two poplar trees which were installed years ago. This is in an upland prairie setting and out of character with the surrounding landscape. The bench receives very little, if any, use. The bench and trees will be removed.

4.4.2 Heritage Appreciation

Issues:

- The Natural Environment Zone will play an important part in giving visitors an appreciation of the park. A number of key opportunities for heritage appreciation are located in the zone:

    - two major auto-accessible viewpoints.
    - Hoodoos Trail (self-guided interpretation).
    - hiking routes in the coulees and on the upland prairie south of the river.

- The opportunity to view independently rock art sites along the Hoodoos Trail and also the Battle Scene contributes much to appreciation of the key historical resources of the park.

Objectives:

- To provide park visitors with opportunities to gain an appreciation of the natural and cultural history of the park.

Actions:

- Interpretive and information signs were upgraded in 1994 at the entrance and Police Coulee viewpoints. These contribute greatly to heritage appreciation and also in creating a positive first impression of the park.

- Although no trail development is proposed in the coulees south of the river, the opportunity to hike in these areas will broaden the experience of a visit to the park for those who take advantage of it.

- Brochures will be prepared and made available to assist visitors in understanding and enjoying the landscapes south of the river.

4.4.3 Outdoor Recreation

Issues:

- The coulees south of the river after a fascinating landscape to explore, but the historical and natural resources are very sensitive to disturbance.

- River tripping on the Milk River is popular. The park serves as both a put-in or take-out point for casual activities such as tubing or more serious river tripping. One commercial raft tour operator also works the river.

- There is a tradition of an annual organized group horseback trail ride in the park. This has had no appreciable impact on the park landscape or other visitors.

Objectives:

- To enable visitors to have the opportunity to hike and explore the unique and fascinating landscapes south of the river.

- To accommodate use of the Milk River for non-motorized river tripping, both by the public and by private operators, provided interference with other park users is minimized.

- To permit existing traditional organized group horseback trail rides to continue.

Actions:

- Visitors interested in exploring south of the river will be provided with several key items of information, particularly:

    - location of park boundaries and requirement to seek landholder permission to enter land adjacent to the park.

    - the risk of grass fires will be emphasized and care that must be taken to avoid starting a fire (eg. no open fires, no smoking if fire hazard greater than Low).

- The existing pattern of traditional organized horseback trail rides will be allowed to continue, but the route, staging area and all related activities must be approved in advance in writing by the Ranger-In-Charge.

- Horseback riding will not be permitted in Police Coulee.

- The impacts of horseback riding on the park landscape or other visitors will be monitored.

- As discussed previously access restrictions will be in place on Police Coulee.

4.4.4 Tourism/Economic Development

Issues:

None.

5.0 LAND USE AND DISPOSITIONS

The purpose of this section is to describe the status of existing leases of land within the park and the management intentions for them.

Discussed also in this section is the matter of public access restrictions required for historical and natural resource protection.

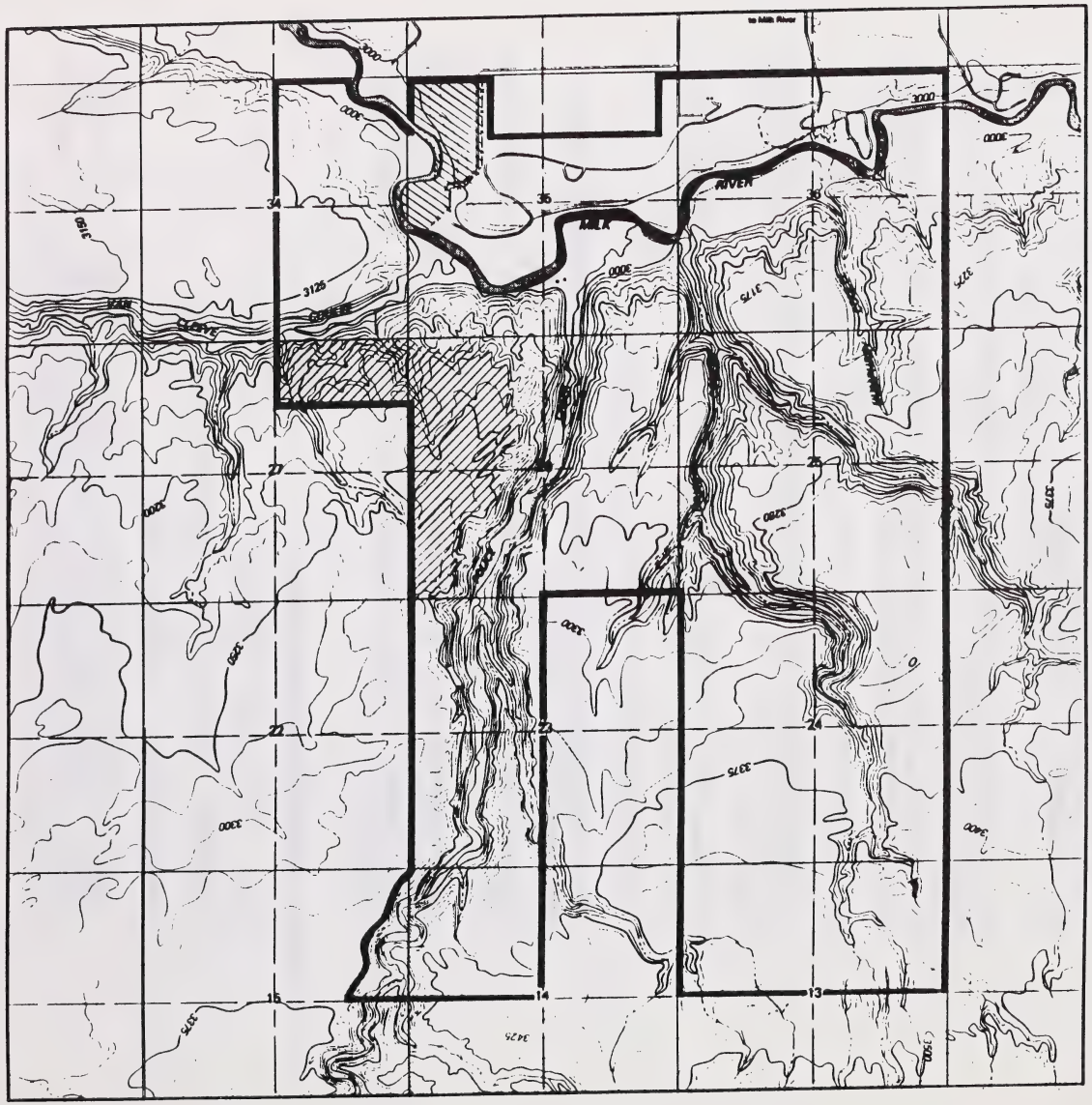
In the park there are two significant leases and some minor easements in the facility area for utilities. The major leases are:

1. Grazing lease on uplands west of Police Coulee

- Area: 230 acres
- Leaseholder: D. Turner, R.M. Turner
- Land Description: - see attached Map 5.
  - lease applies to land above break of slope.
- The land involved was previously cultivated, and in 1987 it was seeded to a mixture of tame and native grasses.
- The lease was set up as a part of purchases and exchanges of land and grazing leases leading up to the expansion of the park in 1991.
- The leaseholder owns the land west of the park adjacent to this grazing lease.
- The lease runs for a ten year term, the current term expiring in 1999. It is intended that the lease will be offered for renewal in accordance with standard practice with grazing leases.
- The lease is for winter grazing only (October 1 - April 30) in accordance with an annual stocking plan.
- The typical stocking rate has been 220 Animal Unit Months.
- The resource management benefit of this grazing lease is the promotion of diversity in the vegetation species composition.
- The lease tends to be lightly used by livestock as the result of its distance from a water source.
- Cattle occasionally stray into Police and Van Cleeve Coulees from the lease. The leaseholder has the responsibility to remove trespass cattle immediately. The present fencing consists of fencing at openings down into the coulees. As required, this fencing will be improved.

2. Rodeo Grounds (Miscellaneous Lease)

- Area: 73.5 acres (29.745 hectares)
- Leaseholder: The Writing-On-Stone Riding Association
- Land Description: - see attached Map 5
- The rodeo grounds have been at this location since 1958, the year after the park was created. The rodeo events at the site are a strong part of local tradition. There is usually only one major event per year. Part of the lease (where the facilities are located) lies within the area designated as a Provincial Historical Resource.



WRITING-ON-STONE PROVINCIAL PARK

MANAGEMENT PLAN

MAP 5

DISPOSITIONS

Long-term Grazing Lease

Miscellaneous Lease (rodeo grounds)

PARK BOUNDARY

SCALE 1:25 000

0 m 500 1000 1500 m

NORTH

TOWNSHIP 1 RANGE 12, 13 WEST OF THE 4th MERIDIAN

- The lease permits uses of the land for rodeos, equestrian and other related events.

- The current lease runs for ten years and expires in 2003. The lease has traditionally been renewed.

- In 1980 a separate access road to the site was constructed and a chain link fence was erected along the east and south sides of the lease to protect the rock art from impacts during rodeos. The lease requires two members of the Riding Association to be designated to patrol and protect the rock art site during rodeo events. A gate at the main entrance to the lease prevents unauthorized vehicle access.

- In view of the traditional importance of the rodeo to the local community and the presence of adequate security fencing the rodeo grounds will remain at the site, for the immediate future, but as a "non-conforming use" relative to the objectives of the park. To enhance and protect the historical landscape of this area of the park it would be desirable for the rodeo grounds to be removed at some future time, when acceptable to all parties.

No new dispositions will be provided in the park for industrial or recreation purposes. As discussed in Section 4.0 in connection with the Natural Environment Zone, a grazing disposition may be considered for upland grasslands south of the river as a tool for achievement of biological diversity objectives and fire hazard control.

Provincial Historic Resource

- The area shown on Map 6 was designated a Provincial Historical Resource under the terms of the Historical Resources Act in 1981.

- As discussed in the section of this plan pertaining to zoning, it is proposed this designation be amended to incorporate rock art sites now lying with the boundaries of the park as a result of the 1991 expansion. This enlarged Provincial Historical Resource is also shown on Map 6. The designation must extend to a legally surveyed limit, which in this case is to quarter sections.

Restricted Access Area

- The area shown on Map 7 was designated in 1977 under the terms of the Provincial Parks Act as an area into which public access is restricted. This was done to protect the rock art. Access is permitted only under the guidance and control of Parks employees.

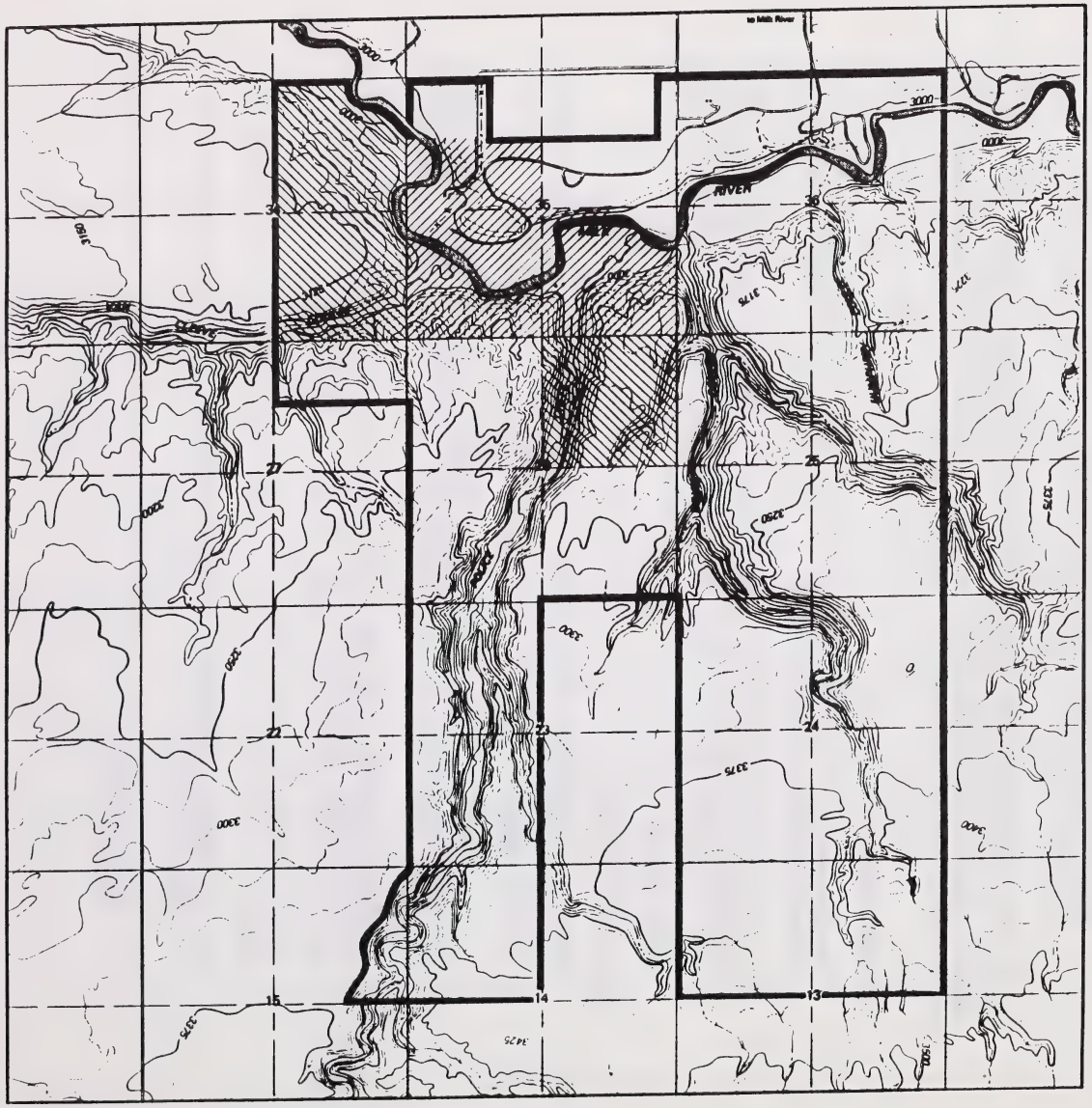
- In order to protect sensitive resources on the expanded park land base, the restricted access area will be expanded as shown on Map 7. This will be done particularly to provide a higher level of protection for rock art in the entrances to Van Cleeve and Police Coulees.

- A seasonal Restricted Access Area will be created in Police Coulee to protect raptors from disturbance during the period when they are nesting and very vulnerable. The seasonal access restriction will be in effect April 15 to July 15 each year.

- Access to the Restricted Access Area for the general public will be managed in one of two ways:

  (1) The public may enter the area while on a guided tour with a guide authorized by the Ranger-In-Charge.

  (2) The public may enter the area unguided only with written permission from the Ranger-In-Charge.



WRITING-ON-STONE PROVINCIAL PARK

MANAGEMENT PLAN

MAP 6

PROVINCIAL HISTORICAL RESOURCE

Existing

Proposed Addition

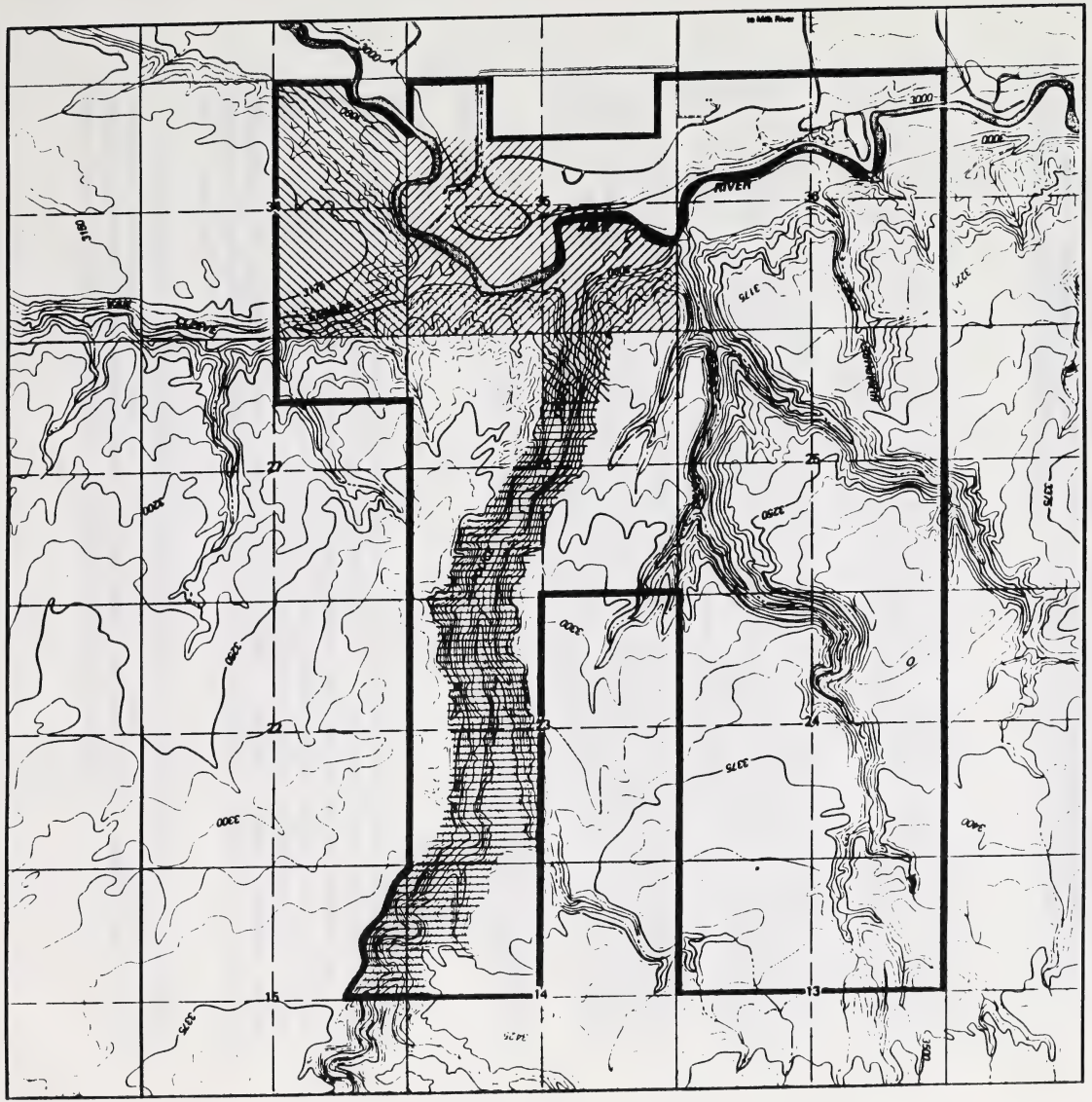
PARK BOUNDARY

SCALE 1:25 000

0 m 500 1000 1500 m

NORTH

TOWNSHIP 1 RANGE 12, 13 WEST OF THE 4th MERIDIAN



WRITING-ON-STONE PROVINCIAL PARK

MANAGEMENT PLAN

MAP 7

RESTRICTED ACCESS AREA

- Existing (Ministerial Order)
- Proposed Addition
- Proposed Addition - seasonal: 15 April to 15 July

PARK BOUNDARY

SCALE 1:25 000

0 m 500 1000 1500 m

NORTH

TOWNSHIP 1 RANGE 12 13 WEST OF THE 4th MERIDIAN

- Public access to Police Coulee would be available from July 15 to April 15. During this time period permits would not be required if travel into or through the permanent Restricted Access Area is not required.

- The Ranger-In-Charge will have the responsibility and authority to issue written permission only in cases where visitors demonstrate their behavior in the Restricted Access Area will be appreciative and appropriate. Access to native rock art sites will generally **not** be permitted.

- As discussed previously in connection with the Heritage Appreciation section of the Historical Protection Zone, natives from the tribes of the northern Great Plains will be permitted to enter the Restricted Access Area for traditional purposes provided the Ranger-In-Charge is advised beforehand of their visit and intentions. Park regulations and policies must be abided by.

- (The designation of an area into which public access is restricted requires extensive regulatory review within government. The recommended additions to the existing Restricted Access Area must be regarded as proposals only until this review is complete.)

6.0 SURROUNDING LAND:

The purpose of this section is to document the activities on land surrounding the park and to discuss any implications for the management of Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park.

The land surrounding the park is a mixture of deeded land primarily used for dryland grain farming and Crown land subject to grazing leases (except for one quarter under cultivation). The status of lands surrounding the park are shown on Maps 8 and 9.

Land Uses

Crown Land Subject to Grazing Leases

The Crown land adjacent to the park is almost all native prairie subject to grazing leases. This land contributes to prairie ecosystem conservation goals and to the historic landscape that is an important attribute of the park.

Fencing is in place on most of the park boundary. The Natural Resources Service will strive to complete the remainder over the next five years.

Private Land

Private land lies adjacent to the park on all four sides. Much of the private land on the west, north and south sides of the park is used for dryland farming. Centre pivot irrigation systems are in place on two parcels in the park vicinity. One quarter section on the east park boundary in the valley of the Milk River is occupied by a farmstead. The balance of the private land is used for grazing on native grassland.

Adjacent to the west park boundary, on the south side of Van Cleeve Coulee, is an 80 acre (32.38 ha) parcel of private land upon which the Natural Resources Service has an easement for access purposes. The parcel is shown on Map 8. Located within the parcel are a number of petroglyphs. The easement provides access to the land for purposes of historical and archaeological study, and guided tours for public education and interpretation.

A possible implication of cultivation on land west of the park is weed encroachment, particularly resulting from soil drifting. The park will be monitored for weeds, and if problems occur, these will be discussed with the adjacent landowners. Good standard agricultural practices, as are presently in place, will minimize this as a potential problem. Weeds occurring in the park will be controlled in accordance with the Weed Control Act.

In view of the recent expansion of the park, no additional land purchase will be actively pursued in the immediate future. However, some possibilities might be studied if the opportunity were to arise.

Other Crown Land

Located adjacent to the north park boundary is a 34.339 hectare (84.85 acre) parcel under the administration of Public Lands Services (see Map 9). This parcel was removed from the park in 1991 as part of the land acquisition arrangements that resulted in park expansion. This parcel had been historically used as a hay field, dating back even to the days of the NWMP. The parcel is locally known as "the hay field" and the vegetation is dominated by crested wheatgrass, an aggressive non-native grass. The field is presently made available for hay cutting permits annually. The parcel was offered for sale by the government but a satisfactory bid was not received.

It is desirable for park purposes that the current use of the parcel continue, as it provides a visual and ecological buffer for the park. Should the parcel be offered for sale again, the Natural Resources Service will request Public Lands Services to place a caveat on it prior to sale to ensure its use is restricted to non-irrigated haying or grazing.

The park land adjacent to the hay field will be periodically monitored to determine if crested wheat grass or other weedy species are encroaching. If this occurs, discussions will be held with staff of Public Lands Services regarding possible solutions.

Located in the hay field is a sharp-tailed grouse lek (dancing ground). Public Lands Services staff will be requested to manage the haying in order that this site is not disturbed or, if possible, enhanced.

Access

There are two main vehicle access routes to the park. The principal access route is on paved road south from S.R. 501 and 878.

A secondary route is place for access to the rodeo grounds. This road is gated at the park boundary so access is limited to organized events.

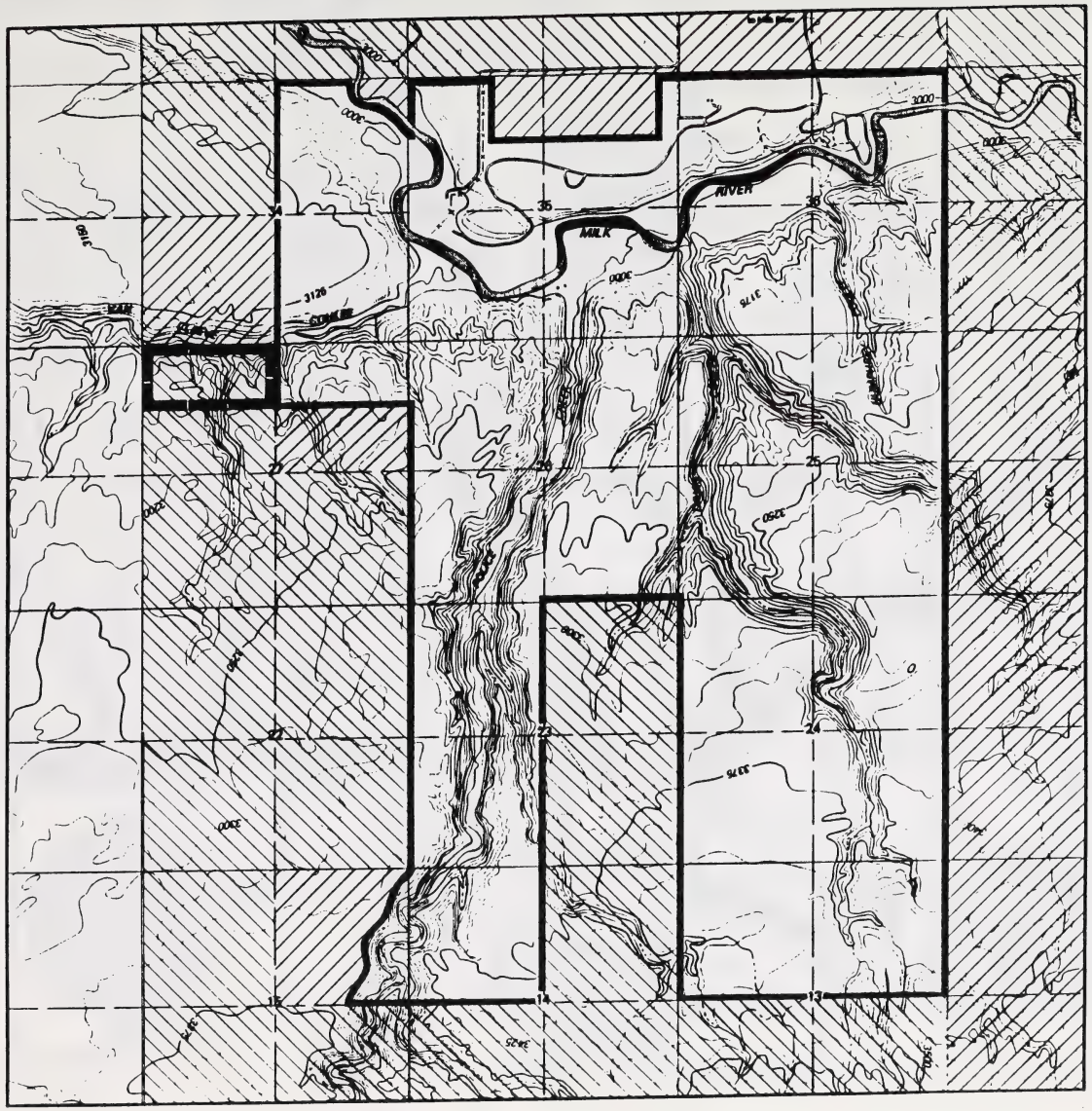
An unimproved prairie trail extends north into the park from S.R. 500 (south of the Milk River). The trail has developed over the years for access to cultivated fields and grazing leases. The trail crosses grazing leases and deeded land so it will not be identified or promoted as a public access route. The route will provide shared access for management purposes, and access will continue to be provided across park land (in NE 13) to private land (NE 14 and SE 23).

Prairie Fire

The threat of prairie fire is a huge concern to ranchers and farmers alike. A single fire could wipe out an operation's income for a year or two. The presence of ungrazed grassland in the park and increased numbers of visitors exploring the park outside facility areas increases the potential for a fire. In the interest of being a responsible neighbour, park management will include steps to reduce the threat of fire.

As discussed in connection with grassland management in the Natural Environment Zone, a grazing system will be implemented, for purposes of fire hazard reduction, as well as promoting biological diversity. Haying may also be considered as a grassland management tool. However, it would be used only as a remedial management tool if necessary to remove excessive standing dead material to successfully initiate a grazing system.

Visitors who hike south of the river will be advised of the fire hazard generally and of the fire hazard rating on the particular day. They will be informed of the danger prairie fire poses to adjacent landholders and to the archaeological features. No open fire will be allowed. Visitors will be advised no smoking is permitted if the fire hazard is rated above "Low".



WRITING-ON-STONE PROVINCIAL PARK

MANAGEMENT PLAN

MAP 8

LAND OWNERSHIP

Crown (Administered by Public Lands Services)

Private

Park access easement on private land

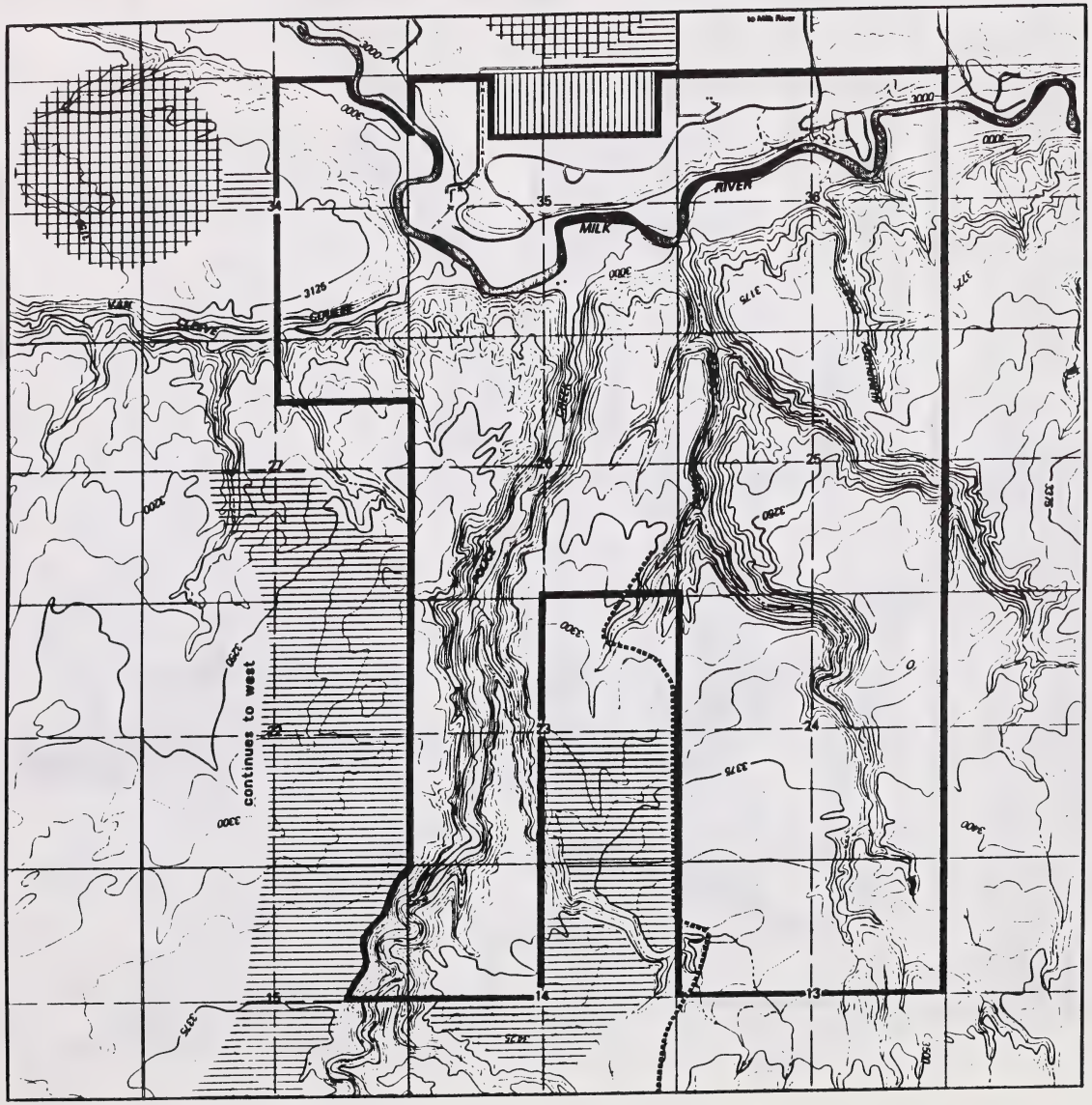
PARK BOUNDARY

SCALE 1:25 000

0 m 500 1000 1500 m

NORTH

TOWNSHIP 1 RANGE 12, 13 WEST OF THE 4th MERIDIAN



WRITING-ON-STONE PROVINCIAL PARK

MANAGEMENT PLAN

MAP 9

ADJACENT LAND USES

- Irrigation
- Dryland farming
- Hay field
- All other land - grazing on native grassland
- Access Trail (management purposes only)

PARK BOUNDARY

SCALE 1:25 000

0 m 500 1000 1500 m

NORTH

TOWNSHIP 1 RANGE 12, 13 WEST OF THE 4th MERIDIAN

7.0 COORDINATION:

Opportunities for coordination between the park, other agencies and adjacent landowners are listed below:

- Dept. of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development
  Public Land Services

  - is providing assistance in preparation of grassland management plan

  - will be requested to maintain the "hay field" (adjacent to north boundary of park) in its present use as a visual and ecological buffer zone

- Dept. of Community Development,
  Archaeological Survey of Alberta
  Historic Sites Services

  - continuation of working relationship for protection, research and interpretation of rock art

- Adjacent landowners

  - will be encouraged to be considerate of the scenic views from the park, particularly in the areas visible between southeast and southwest, if planning to construct buildings.

  - will be encouraged to assist in the management of the local mule deer population (i.e. by allowing hunting on their land and leases, if hunting is also being allowed in the park)

8.0 DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENTS:

Based on the issues noted and objectives stated for park land management zones in Section 4.0, a number of development requirements for the park have been identified. Their listing below does not guarantee these projects will be carried out, as funding is not assured. Projects are listed below in an approximate order of priority.

1. Fencing

a) Purpose

- To assist in grassland management through grazing.

b) Design Considerations

- Some permanent fencing may be required for management of livestock, but will be minimized to avoid visual intrusions. Temporary fencing will be used as much as possible.

2. Campground Improvements

a) Purpose:

- To create designated campsites to reduce crowding and impacts on the park landscape.
- To enable a reservation system to be established.

b) Design Considerations:

- The very dense shrubbery (for privacy) and the opportunity to camp in small groups has proven to be satisfactory for visitors. This type of arrangement will be retained.
- The area occupied by the campground could be utilized more efficiently, while retaining the existing (or an increased) number of campsites and increasing vegetation cover for screening and wildlife habitat.

c) Operational Implications:

- Additional sites would create additional maintenance workload, but would also increase revenue.
- Amount of grass mowing could be reduced.
- Campground would have a defined capacity so improved signs and information systems would be required to advise travelers when the campground is full before driving from Milk River to the park.
- As this will be a change in traditional use, park staff will use the first season as an education period (i.e. a lenient policy towards accommodating overflow for one season).
- Staff may be required to operate the reservation system.

d) Private Sector Involvement:

- The defined capacity campground will generate more demand for camping in the Milk River Area.

- Once the campground has been reconstructed with a defined capacity, campground capacity will not be expanded in the park. Additional demand will be serviced by the private sector.

3. Trailheads Upgrade

a) Purpose:

- To improve trailheads so their location is more obvious and to provide improved information about the trails.

b) Design Considerations

- Three trailheads would be upgraded: Battle Scene and both ends of the Hoodoo Trail.
- The trailhead signs would relate to the motif used for the interpretive signs.

4. Outdoor Theatre

a) Purpose:

- To upgrade the very basic existing facility.

b) Design Considerations:

- Could be linked to or coordinated with the proposed visitor centre.

5. Visitors Centre

a) Purpose:

- To give visitors a greater opportunity to learn about and appreciate the natural and human history of the park.
- To provide a climate-controlled setting in which to conserve and present exhibits.
- To improve the appeal of the park as a destination in fall, spring and winter.
- To improve the quality of setting for contact with park visitors. (Both the naturalists' and park rangers' offices are work camp-style trailers. Neither of these facilities create a particularly favourable impression of the Natural Resources Service, especially at one of its premier resource protection and heritage appreciation parks.)

b) Design Considerations:

- A program for the building is required to confirm its functions and features.
- The building could be located on the prairie level or in the valley. Once the building program is determined, the issue of location will be studied.
- Specific considerations:
  - cost of construction
  - connections with existing interpretive facilities and programs.
  - possible linkage with an outdoor theatre.

- requirement for roads, parking lots or utilities.
- visual and other impacts on the park landscape.
- coordination with other functions (eg. staff office space).
- risk of flooding
- views of the park from the building.
- convenience of access for park visitors.
- in consideration of the unique and distinctive setting (regardless of the precise location) the building must be the product of thoughtful architectural design.

c) Operational Implications:

- Could improve staff utilization
  - clerical function in summer season at park office in maintenance area could be combined with information and tour ticket dispensing function (presently at naturalists' office)
- Would add to maintenance and utility costs.

d) Partnership/Private Sector Involvement:

- The Blood Indian Tribe has expressed strong interest in a visitors centre, in terms of presenting their stories to visitors to aid in cross-cultural understanding and also as a means to assist in education of their own people in Blackfoot ways. Possibly the Blood Tribe (and other Blackfoot tribes) could raise funds through the federal government or other sources.
- The building may be able to sustain a small food and camper services concession during the peak months. The feasibility of this opportunity will be investigated, in conjunction with a possible campground operations contract.

6. Park Office

NOTE: A separate park office would be pursued only if a visitor centre design is selected that has limited office space or if funding for a visitor centre cannot be secured.

a) Purpose:

- To provide a more permanent and presentable office setting for the ranger-in-charge and clerical support.

b) Design Considerations:

- The office would be located in the maintenance area and would be a plain utilitarian structure.
- The feasibility of adding office space to the existing shop building could be investigated.

7. **Powerline Burial**

a) **Purpose:**

- To remove an intrusion on the scenic landscape visible from the entrance viewpoint.

b) **Design Considerations:**

- The powerline servicing the facility area in the valley runs adjacent to the entrance road and the entrance viewpoint then down across the hoodoos to the valley bottom.

- The powerline could be trenched beside the park road.

Previous Projects

In considering the foregoing project proposals it should be acknowledged that a number of facilities have been installed or upgraded in recent years:

- shower building
- group-use area, including shelter
- interpretive and information signs
- new trails and upgrades of existing trails
- play structure in day-use area
- new toilets
- maintenance shop
- roads and parking, including asphalt pavement on main park access road
- pressurized water brought into park from local water co-op and treated for human consumption
- irrigation system

Group-use Area

Although there is considerable demand for group-use facilities, the present site has no room for expansion. This demand will be drawn to the attention of the County and the private sector, with a view to this demand being met at a location other than Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park.

9.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN PARK MANAGEMENT

The Dept. of Environmental Protection is committed to the principle of public involvement in its decision making. In this section a role is described for ongoing public involvement in the management of Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park.

Successful public involvement in the management of the park and the implementation of this plan can be achieved through maintaining good communication and relationships with groups and individuals with an interest in the park. It is not believed to be necessary to create a formal body for this purpose.

Plan Review

This plan presents the management direction for the park for ten years, after which the plan will be subject to review. The management plan review will be the main formal mechanism for public assessment of park management direction. Most issues that may arise in the interim are expected to be resolvable at the practical field level.

Role of Native People

Contact with the Blood Tribe, the native group that appears to have the strongest interest in the park, was a very educational experience for members of the planning team. As a result of this, efforts will be made to improve communications with the native community and to encourage their interest and involvement in the park.

Clearly the park is an exceptionally special place for the Blackfoot people. Despite the previous efforts of park staff to accommodate the needs of natives in their visits to the park (i.e. for rituals) the planning team was given the message that the Blackfoot people have not felt welcome at the park. The reason for this is not clear, but this perception must be dispelled.

As in the past, the Blackfoot people will be encouraged to visit the park and if special arrangements are required for access to the rock art areas for ceremonies or other rituals, these will be made. Special activities must be coordinated with other park functions, but every reasonable effort will be made to accommodate them. These provisions for the Blackfoot people will also be extended to other tribes of the northern Great Plains who may have an ancestral connection to the rock art.

The Blackfoot people will also be invited and encouraged to bring their young people to the park, for example, from the Red Crow College on the Blood Reserve. Visits to the park could be an important part of their heritage education.

Ways will be explored to try to increase involvement of the Blackfoot people in the interpretation of the rock art and of their ways and history. Possibilities include having native elders or others directly involved in providing interpretation on a regular or occasional basis and providing training to park interpreters. Such involvement in the park interpretive program could benefit both the Blackfoot people and people of other cultures by improving cross-cultural communication.

When Blackfoot people have been previously directly involved, the experience for non-native park visitors is greatly enriched. Having the benefit of interpretation from someone who is intimately connected to Blackfoot culture, the rock art and the mysteries of the past makes the experience much more immediate and real.

The process of preparing this management plan has opened doors to communication between the Blood Tribe and park staff. It is hoped these channels will remain open and it is intended that ways will be fully explored to have greater involvement of the Blackfoot people at Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park.

Cooperating Association

Cooperating associations have been established at other parks (eg. Dinosaur Natural History Association) and can have numerous benefits for both the public and park management. Possible benefits in the case of Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park include improved support for interpretive and educational programs as well as avenues for involvement by native peoples. Those members of the public who care deeply about the park could also have a way of becoming more involved in it.

Park staff will take steps to encourage the creation of a cooperating association for Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park.

10.0 PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE PARK NAME

To recognize the central role natives have played in creating the special mystique and character of Writing-On-Stone, it is proposed the Blackfoot name for the area be added to the existing park name. The addition of the Blackfoot name would be a respectful gesture by the Government of Alberta that would be appreciated by the Blackfoot people.

It is expected that in day-to-day speech people would continue to use the park name with which they are most familiar. The full name as amended would be used primarily in printed material.

Park staff will consult with the Blackfoot tribes to confirm the Blackfoot name, its spelling and translation. Once the name is confirmed, steps will be taken to officially amend the park name.

11.0 APPLICATION FOR WORLD HERITAGE SITE STATUS

It is the opinion of staff in both the Departments of Environmental Protection and Community Development that Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park could be a legitimate candidate for UNESCO World Heritage Site Status.

Such designation can have several benefits, including increased tourism, increased awareness of the need to protect the site and possibly an increased ability to attract funds to improve programs and protection.

It is the intention of the Departments of Environmental Protection and Community Development to work cooperatively in the preparation of a nomination for World Heritage Site Status.

12.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW:

This plan is intended to guide park management over the ten-year period following approval. The goal of parks staff will be to accomplish all actions identified in this plan during the period.

Some of the actions identified for action in this plan require capital budget funds to implement. To a large degree these budget decisions are beyond the control of Natural Resources Service staff and management. However, the capital projects will be proposed for funding during the ten-year cycle of this plan. Preliminary planning and design for the projects will be carried out, pending funds for implementation.

At the end of the ten-year period the plan will be opened for review. The public will be asked to evaluate the accomplishments of the planning period and to provide advice for a further ten-year period.

13.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Alberta Recreation and Parks. 1984. Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park. Master Planning Study, Policy and Concept Alternatives Report. Design and Implementation Division, Planning Branch. Edmonton, Alberta.

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Cottonwood Consultants Ltd. 1987. Environmentally Significant Areas in the Oldman River Region, County of Warner. Resource Evaluation and Planning, Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife. Edmonton, Alberta. Oldman River Regional Planning Commission. Lethbridge, Alberta.

Lancaster, J. 1990. Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park Resource Management Plan. Alberta Recreation and Parks.

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APPENDIX 'A'

Public Involvement In Preparation Of The Management Plan

Public input occurred at two stages: Firstly, prior to preparation of a first draft, in order to identify issues and to receive general guidance in choosing objectives and guidelines. Secondly, once a draft plan was prepared, it was provided for review by the individuals, organizations and agencies who provided input in the first stage. Comments received on the draft plan were considered and the final plan was prepared.

First Stage

In the first stage of public involvement an information package and questionnaire was prepared. This was sent to park neighbours and local and provincial organizations expected to have an interest in management of the park. The organizations contacted are listed below. The information package and questionnaire was provided to park visitors during the summer of 1993 for their input. Three well-advertised open house sessions were held, one in Milk River, Lethbridge and Calgary. Prior to initiation of public involvement, the M.L.A. for the Taber-Warner Electoral Division, Mr. Ron Hierath was briefed on the process.

The organizations contacted included the tribes of the Blackfoot Nation - the Blood Tribe, Siksika Nation and Peigan Nation - in consideration of their special relationship to the park and the rock art. The Blood Tribe was the only respondent. Two meetings were held with Blood Tribe members. The first was on the Blood Indian Reserve at which park management issues of concern to the Blood Tribe were discussed with planning team members. The second was a meeting at the park at which about 50 members of the Blood Tribe and also South Peigan Tribe from the Blackfoot Indian Reservation in Montana were present. This was a general tour of the park and rock art sites, followed by elders telling stories about Writing-On-Stone.

Second Stage

Upon completion of the draft management plan, a brief summary of the draft plan was prepared and the following public review steps were carried out:

- Copy of draft plan and summary was provided to the M.L.A., Mr. Ron Hierath.
- Park neighbors were contacted and provided with copies of the draft plan and summary.
- Copies of draft plan and summary were sent to groups and organizations that were believed to be interested in the management planning.
- Copies of the draft plan and summary were sent to the Chiefs and Councils of the tribes of the Blackfoot Nation (in Canada): Blood Tribe, Peigan Nation and Siksika Nation.
- Copies of the draft plan summary were sent to members of the general public who had provided comments (and their addresses) in the first stage.
- An information session was held in Milk River to discuss the draft plan with the general public.
- A meeting was held with representatives of the Blood Tribe to discuss the draft management plan.
- The planning team met to discuss the responses to the draft plan and consider changes.
- The final plan was prepared.

Organizations Contacted During Preparation of the Management Plan

Grasslands Naturalists	Medicine Hat
Lethbridge Naturalists Society	Lethbridge
Siksika Nation	Gleichen
Blood Tribe	Standoff
Peigan Nation	Brocket
Milk River Canoe Club	Milk River
Alberta Wilderness Association	Calgary
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society	Calgary
Town of Milk River	
Village of Coutts	
Village of Warner	
County of Warner	
Milk River Raft Tours	Milk River
Police Coulee Trail Rides	Coutts
Writing-On-Stone Riding Association	Milk River
Southern Alberta Outdoorsmen	Milk River
St. Mary's Outdoor Club	Taber
Milk River Chamber of Commerce	
South Country Hosts	Milk River
Milk River Tourism Action Committee	

APPENDIX "B"

Description of
Writing-On-Stone
Environmentally Significant Area
as found in:

Environmentally Significant Areas
in the Oldman River Region,
County of Warner

WRITING-ON STONE
COUNTY OF WARNER

SITE LOCATION:

- Milk River valley and associated coulees and uplands in the vicinity of Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, upstream to Verdigris Coulee
- Tp. 1 and 2 - Rge. 12, 13 and 14 - W4

DESCRIPTION:

- diverse and productive riparian plains cottonwood, low and tall shrubbery, beaver ponds, moist alkaline meadows, clear streams, rock outcrops and grasslands
- ungrazed mixed grassland, coulee and riparian habitats in Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park
- massive sandstone outcrops and intriguing rock formations
- high density of nesting birds of prey including Prairie Falcons, Golden Eagles and Ferruginous Hawks (a threatened species)
- historic nesting area for Peregrine Falcons (an endangered species)
- rare or uncommon mammals, including Yellow-bellied Marmot and Bobcat
- diverse populations and high numbers of breeding and migrating birds
- rare or uncommon butterflies
- key Mule Deer and White-tailed Deer habitat
- Prairie Rattlesnake and Bull Snake hibernacula (overwintering areas)
- Short-horned Lizards along coulee rims (a threatened species)
- rare plants, including nodding umbrella plant (Eriogonum cernuum), American pellitory (Parieteria pensylvanica), little-seeded rice grass (Oryzopsis micrantha), green milkweed (Asclepias viridiflora), Moquin's see-blite (Suaeda moquinii), prickly milk-vetch (Astragalus kentrophyta), low milk-vetch (Astragalus lotiflorus), western hawksbeard (Crepis occidentalis), tufted hymenopappus (Hymenopappus filifolius), red three-awn (Aristida longiseta), six-weeks fescue (Vulpia octoflora), downy paintbrush (Castilleja sessiiiflora); several of these are rare in Canada
- sandy outwash plain on upland north of the river
- type section for Upper Cretaceous rocks of the Lower Milk River Formation in Police Coulee in Section 35 - Tp. 1 - Rge. 13 - W4
- rare fish including Brassy Minnow, Silvery Minnow, Finescale Dace and Stonecat

SIGNIFICANCE: National and International

- the diversity of habitats and landscapes is unsurpassed in the mixed grasslands of Canada
- concentration of significant features
- geological type localities are unique and form the basis upon which further geological investigations proceed
- ungrazed habitats in the mixed grassland region of Canada are rare
- high concentration of rare plants, wildlife and fish, including some which are threatened or endangered
- clear flowing streams are rare in the grassland region
- highly significant archeological resources complement the natural features

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS:

- altered stream flow affects the reproduction of cottonwood forests
- heavy grazing reduces the suitability of these habitats for a variety of plants and wildlife and affects the regeneration of cottonwoods
- cattle usage and developments along creeks could reduce water quality and destroy spawning grounds for rare fish like the silvery minnow
- clearing and cultivation eliminate habitat diversity
- hibernacula are critical to the survival of several snakes; disturbance can lead to significant population losses

REFERENCES:

- 1986 field program notes
- Fish and Wildlife key area maps
- Willock (1968), McAllister (1970), Paetz and Nelson (1970), and Clayton and Ash (1980) for fish
- Packer and Bradley (1984) and Wallis (1986) for rare plant status
- Wershler (1976) and Campbell (1981) for natural history overview
- Bardendregt (n.d.), Russell and Landes (1940), Westgate (1968) and Beaty (1975) for geology
- Wallis (1980 and 1987) and Cottonwood Consultants (1983) for riparian description and significance
- Bradley and Smith (1986) and Smith and Flake (1981) for impacts of altered stream flow and grazing on cottonwood systems
- Pinel and Kondla (1985) for butterflies

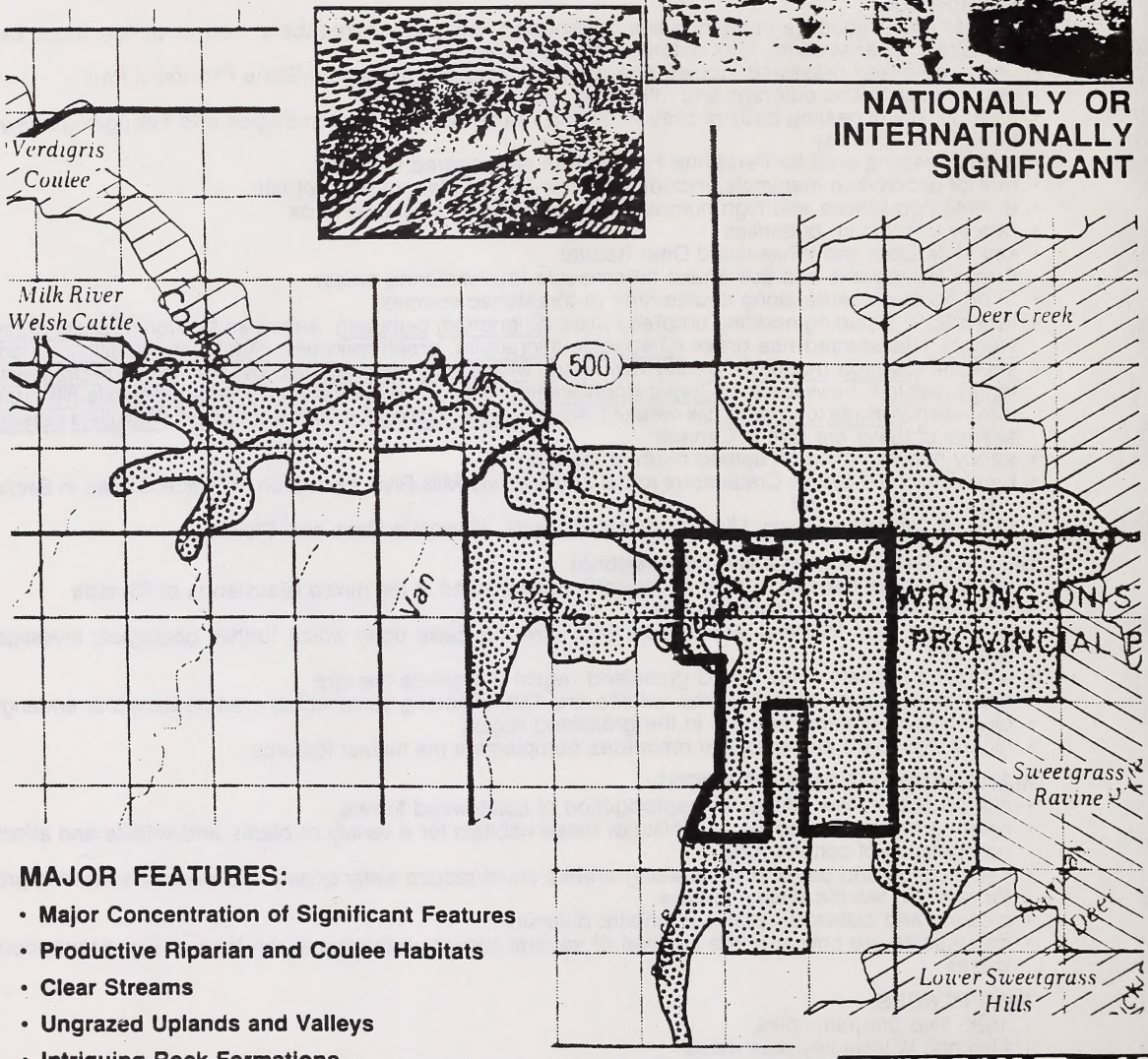
WRITING-ON-STONE
COUNTY OF WARNER

SCALE - 1:125,000

0 1 km 3 5 7

0 1 mi 2 3 5

NATIONALLY OR INTERNATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT



MAJOR FEATURES:

- Major Concentration of Significant Features
- Productive Riparian and Coulee Habitats
- Clear Streams
- Ungrazed Uplands and Valleys
- Intriguing Rock Formations
- High Density of Nesting Birds of Prey
- Diverse Breeding Bird Populations
- Concentration of Rare and Threatened Species
- Key Deer Habitat
- Snake Overwintering Areas
- Type Geological Section

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